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Bertha Davidson Hoxie

"It's very tiresome your being only a doll, Dorothea."

Page 7.



# BRAVE LITTLE PEGGY

BY

NINA RHOADES

Author of "Priscilla of the Doll Shop," "Only Dollie," "The Little Girl Next Door," "The Children on the Top Floor," "Winifred's Neighbors," "How Barbara Kept Her Promise," and "Marion's Vacation"

*ILLUSTRATED BY*

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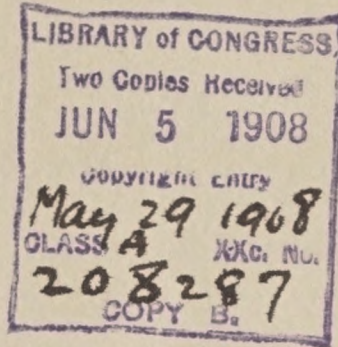
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# BRAVE LITTLE PEGGY

## CHAPTER I

### PEGGY

**I** THINK it's the most beautiful letter anybody ever had, don't you, Dorothea?"

There were tears of joy and pride in Peggy's brown eyes, and her dark little face was flushed with excitement, as she tenderly folded her letter, and replaced it in her pocket, but Dorothea stared straight before her with her expressionless blue eyes, and made no response.

"It's very tiresome your being only a doll, Dorothea," Peggy went on, with a sigh, lifting the big French doll from the bench beside her into her lap. "If you could only talk there are so many questions I should like to ask you. You've seen her—just think, Dorothea, you've actually seen her—and yet you can't tell me a single thing about her. I want so much to know what she said the day she bought you.



I'm sure she chose you because you were the prettiest doll in the store. She's beautiful herself, I know that from her picture, but I do want to know how she talks, and whether she's always smiling the way she does in the photograph. I suppose she always wears pretty dresses, though of course she didn't have much money to buy them with till after Uncle Henry died. Grandma says it was very kind of Uncle Henry to take Harry and Edith to live with him after papa and mamma were drowned, but he didn't believe in giving young people too much money to spend, so Edith had to make some of her own clothes. She's got everything she wants now, because you know, Dorothea, Uncle Henry left all his money to Harry and Edith, and they've got a lovely home in Montclair, New Jersey. You never saw that because you came straight from the toy store in New York, but I shall see it some day when I go to visit them, and perhaps if you're very good I'll take you with me."

Peggy paused, but Dorothea's countenance remained immovable, and after a moment she went on again.

"I do wonder what Montclair, New Jersey, is like. It's very different from California I



know, because grandma says so. Grandma doesn't like the East, but my mamma always lived there, and so did I till I was four. I can't remember much about it, but I know there weren't any orange groves or palm trees, and sometimes it was very cold. O dear! here comes Maud, and now I've got to amuse her. Maud is such a difficult person to amuse."

Dorothea was gently replaced on the garden bench, and Peggy, not without reluctance, but mindful of her duties as hostess, went forward to meet her cousin, who was coming slowly across the lawn.

Maud had blue eyes and long yellow curls, and Peggy regarded her with secret envy, blue eyes and golden hair being the two things she desired most on earth, but just now Maud was not looking particularly happy. There was a discontented expression in the blue eyes, and her lips were drawn in an unmistakable pout.

"Fraulein says we mustn't play near the house or make any noise," she announced, as Peggy joined her. "Grandma's asleep, and they don't want to have her disturbed."

Peggy looked troubled.

"She isn't any worse, is she?" she inquired, anxiously.



"I don't know. Mamma and the nurse were whispering in the hall, and mamma told me to run away and play with you. I don't see what we're to play, though, if we're not to make any noise."

"People don't always have to make a noise when they play," said Peggy, cheerfully. "I know lots of nice quiet games."

"Oh, you like to play with dolls and rubbish like that," retorted Maud, with a contemptuous glance in the direction of the unconscious Dorothea. "I do think the way you sit and talk to that silly old doll, just as if she understood what you said, is too silly for anything. You're only six months younger than I am, and I haven't touched a doll in ever so many years."

"You're not eleven yet," said Peggy, flushing, "and I mean to play with dolls till I'm fourteen. Fraulein says little girls in Germany always play with dolls, and they embroider and do all kinds of fancy work while their mothers or their governesses read aloud to them."

"Fraulein's an old stupid," returned Maud, stretching herself on the soft grass at the foot of a tall palm tree. "I wouldn't have her for my governess for the world; she hasn't a bit of fun in her. She looks shocked if she sees me



climb a fence. I wonder what she'd say if she saw some of the things the boys and I do at home."

"Does your governess let you climb fences?" Peggy inquired with interest.

"She hasn't anything to say about it. Papa and mamma never allow us to be interfered with. We never keep a governess very long, anyway; we had three last year."

"And aren't you ever punished?" Peggy questioned, her brown eyes opening wide with astonishment.

"Hardly ever. Charlie did have to go without dessert the day he nearly put old Mrs. Jackson's eye out with his bean shooter, but that was an exception. Mrs. Jackson is an old lady who lives next door to us, and she's always fussing and making complaints about our boys, so one day when she was watering her flowers Charlie climbed the fence and aimed his bean shooter at her just for fun. Of course he didn't mean to hit her in the eye, but she turned her head just at the wrong minute, and my, but there was a row!"

"I should think there would have been," said Peggy, feelingly. "Did Charlie feel dreadfully about it?"



“Oh, he was pretty scared, and Miss Harris, the governess we had then, said if Mrs. Jackson went blind she might sue us for damages, but she got all right in a few days, and then we were rather glad it had happened, for we thought it served her right for being such a disagreeable old thing. Mamma said she made a great deal of unnecessary fuss, anyway; she might have known Charlie didn't mean to hurt her.”

“I suppose one reason you don't care about dolls is because you haven't any sisters and always played with boys,” said Peggy, reflectively. She would have liked to express her opinion of Charlie's conduct, but feared it would not be just the thing to do so. Maud was a visitor, and grandma had taught her always to be polite to visitors.

“I hate girls' games,” was Maud's uncompromising answer. “Say, what are we going to do this afternoon?” she added, impatiently.

Peggy hesitated.

“We might go for a walk,” she suggested doubtfully. “It's lovely down in the grove, and grandma wouldn't mind our going there by ourselves. We might find some ripe oranges.”

“I've eaten so many oranges since I came



here that I feel as if I never wanted to taste another one," said Maud, discontentedly. "I wish you had a pony I could ride."

"I wish I had," said Peggy. "Grandma is going to buy me a nice gentle pony this summer. Dr. Scott says it's time I learned to ride, but grandma's so afraid I might get hurt."

"Oh, what a fuss-cat!" exclaimed Maud in a tone of infinite scorn. "Why, I've ridden ever since I was five. My pony threw me over his head once, and my arm was broken, but I was on his back again the very next day, driving with one hand."

"You must be very brave," said Peggy, with a look of such genuine admiration that Maud looked quite mollified.

"I guess we are a pretty brave family," she remarked placidly, "but then you are a dreadful coward, you know, so you can't judge."

The color deepened in Peggy's cheeks and her eyes drooped.

"I'm afraid I am," she admitted reluctantly. "I know it's dreadfully silly, but I can't help being afraid of a good many things; the dark, and fierce dogs, and earthquakes."

"You come and stay with us and we'll soon cure you," said Maud, with a superior smile.



"A boy visited us who was an awful coward, but Dick and Charlie never gave him a minute's peace till they'd cured him. He's really quite a decent sort of boy now."

"I don't think I should like——" began Peggy, then checked herself, and added hastily——

"Perhaps you would like to have me read Edith's letter to you; it's very interesting."

"What, that old letter you got ever so many days ago! Haven't you torn it up yet?"

"I never tear up Edith's letters," said Peggy, indignantly. "I've got every one she ever wrote me, all put away in a box. Why, just think, Maud, she's my own precious sister, and I haven't seen her since I was four. If you hadn't seen one of your brothers since you were four wouldn't you keep all his letters?"

"I don't believe he'd write. Boys hate writing, and so do I."

"Yes I suppose they do hate it," Peggy admitted. "My brother never writes to me, but Edith does, such lovely letters."

"Does she write very often?" Maud inquired.

"Ye-es, at least pretty often. You see, she's a very fashionable young lady, and of course she has to be pretty busy."



"Why doesn't she ever come to see you, or have you go and stay with her?"

"I think she would like to see me very much, but it's a very long way to Montclair, New Jersey, and it costs a great deal of money, too. Grandma says I shall go some day when I'm older, and it's the loveliest thing to think about."

"Why didn't you all live together after your father and mother were drowned?" Maud inquired, with a yawn.

"Don't you know—didn't you ever hear about it?"

"No, I guess not, or if I did, I've forgotten."

"Well," said Peggy, settling herself comfortably by her cousin's side, and charmed to have at last found a subject in which Maud seemed to be interested; "you see when my papa left college he went to live in New York. My mamma had always lived there and she didn't think she'd like California, so after they were married papa always stayed in the East. They came here to see grandma sometimes, and once she went to New York to visit them, but that was before I was born. Harry and Edith are a great deal older than I am, and so when I came every one was very glad. They used to pet me a great deal, and grandma says I was very much



spoiled. Then, when I was four papa and mamma went yachting with some friends, and there was a dreadful storm, and the yacht went on a rock, and they were both drowned. It was very sad, and every one was sorry for us. Uncle Henry—he was mamma's uncle, who had brought her up when she was a little girl—said he would take Harry and Edith, but grandma wanted me, because I was the youngest and was named for her. She came all the way to New York for me herself and brought me home with her. My papa didn't have very much money, and when he died there was only a very little left for us. Uncle Henry sent Edith to boarding-school, and Harry to college, and when he died last year he left them all his money."

"Do you suppose grandma will leave you all her money when she dies?" inquired Maud.

"I don't know, I'm sure, and I don't care. Grandma isn't very old; she won't have to die for ever so many years."

"She isn't so old, but she's very ill, mamma says. I heard her telling Fraulein that she would never have come all the way from San Francisco, and left papa and the boys, if she hadn't been so worried about grandma."



The troubled expression came back into Peggy's face, and her lip trembled.

"People don't have to die just because they're ill," she said. "I was very ill when I had the measles, and I got well all right. Grandma's ever so much better, too; she told me so this morning."

"Well, they won't let me go into her room, so I can't tell whether she's better or not. Mamma says she thinks it very strange that grandma never asks to see me."

Peggy looked rather embarrassed.

"Well, you see," she said apologetically, "I suppose grandma's head aches, and that makes her nervous, and then, Maud, you know you are rather restless; you don't like keeping still."

"Of course I don't, but mamma says that isn't any reason why she shouldn't be just as fond of me as she is of you. She's my grandma the same as she's yours, anyway."

Peggy was silent; there really seemed nothing to say, and after a little pause Maud changed the subject by remarking—

"Is that Edith's photograph on your bureau?"

"Yes, she sent it to me for my birthday, in



that lovely silver frame. Isn't she the prettiest young lady you ever saw?"

"She's pretty good-looking," Maud admitted. "I don't believe she'd want to be bothered with you, though. Grown-up young ladies don't care much about children. My friend Olive Mortimer has two grown-up sisters, and they won't let her come into their room for fear she'll meddle with their things, and they make an awful fuss about her coming to the table when they have company."

"My sister isn't like that," declared Peggy, confidently. "Do let me read you her letter, and you'll see how sweet and dear she is."

"Oh, all right, go ahead," returned Maud, indifferently, and Peggy, gladly availing herself of the permission, drew from her pocket the crumpled letter, the contents of which she already knew almost by heart.

" 'MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY,

" 'APRIL TENTH.

" 'MY PRECIOUS PUSSY-CAT,—

"She always calls me Pussy-cat in her letters," Peggy explained. "I think it's a sweet name, don't you?"

"It sounds awfully silly but go on."



“ ‘I am a real mean, unkind old sister to leave your dear little letter unanswered for such a long time, and I am really quite ashamed of myself. You ought to punish me by not writing again for ever so long, but I know you won’t do that, because you know, that even if I don’t write as often as I ought, I am loving you all the time.

“ ‘I am a very busy person in these days, for I have the housekeeping to attend to, as well as my social engagements to keep. We have such a dear little house. I am going to ask Harry to take a photograph of it for you. There is a pretty little yard in front, and a stable in the back. We haven’t any horse to keep in the stable as yet, but if Harry goes on doing as well as he is now, we may have one some day. The trees are budding now, and in a few weeks it will be beautiful here. I suppose it is always beautiful in California, so you don’t appreciate the Spring as much as we do. By the way, thank you for the pressed flowers you sent me. They are very nice, and I have put them in a book.

“ ‘I have the cushion you made me for Christmas on my bureau. I think you were very clever to make it all by yourself. I am sure



I couldn't have done such fine work when I was ten. Harry was delighted with his handkerchief-case, too. He told me to be sure to thank you for him when I wrote.

“ ‘ I am so glad you liked the doll I sent, and I think Dorothea is a very pretty name for her. There are not many children in this neighborhood, so I can't tell you about the little girls I know, as you asked me to, but I like children very much, and I think they rather like me, too. Some day we must coax grandma to let you come and make us a visit, and then we will have such good times together.

“ ‘ I must stop writing, as I am going out to luncheon, but I really will write again soon next time. Give our love to grandma, and tell her how sorry we are to hear she has not been well. And now good-bye, my Pussy-cat, with a big kiss, and a heart full of love from

“ ‘ Your naughty, neglectful, but ever-loving sister,  
“ ‘ EDITH LEE.’

“ There,” said Peggy, triumphantly, “ isn't that a beautiful letter? ”

“ It's nice enough,” Mand admitted, “ but seems to me April's rather late to thank people for their Christmas presents.”



"Oh, well, you see, they were such little bits of presents, and she's so very busy. She wrote just before Christmas, and she sent me Dorothea. Harry sent me a Christmas present, too, such a pretty pin. I thought it was lovely of him, and so did grandma. Oh, here comes Fraulein; sha'n't we ask her to read to us?"

"I hate reading," objected Maud. "I never look at a book unless I have to, but it's so stupid here I suppose I might as well listen as do anything else."

But when Fraulein joined the children there was a look in her face which caused Peggy to forget all about everything else.

"What's the matter, Fraulein?" she demanded, anxiously, springing to her feet. "Has anything happened?"

"No, no, my child," the governess answered, laying her hand gently on the little girl's head, "nothing has happened, but your grandmother is awake and has asked for you."

"Does she want to see me too, Fraulein?" Maud inquired, eagerly.

Fraulein shook her head.

"Not just now, my dear," she said; "perhaps by and by. Wait here for Peggy; she will only be a few moments away."



Then she took Peggy's hand, and led her quickly across the lawn and into the house. The little girl's heart was beating fast, and at the foot of the broad oak staircase she drew back nervously.

"Is grandma worse, Fraulein?" she asked in a frightened whisper.

"We hope not, my child. She has had a faint turn, and Miss Brown has telephoned for the doctor, but we trust it may be nothing serious."

Peggy asked no more questions, but held Fraulein's hand tight, and without another word they went upstairs, and entered the room which for as long as Peggy could remember had always been grandma's.

Old Mrs. Lee was lying in her bed, breathing heavily. Her daughter, Mrs. Eliot—Maud's mother—stood by the bedside fanning her, while Miss Brown, the trained nurse, held a glass of something to her lips. Grandma's face looked white and drawn, but at sight of Peggy she smiled faintly, and tried to hold out her hand.

"My little Peggy," she murmured softly; "grandma's own little girl."

Aunt Mary and Miss Brown both moved



aside, and with a heart beating so fast that she could scarcely breathe Peggy came close to the bed.

"Kiss her, dear," Aunt Mary whispered, and the little girl bent down and pressed her warm rosy lips to the cold pale face on the pillow.

"Do you feel better, grandma dear?" she asked in a shaking voice. "Oh, I do hope you feel better."

"Yes, yes, my darling, I am better," the old lady answered. "God bless you, Peggy; good night."

"Why, grandma, it isn't nearly bedtime; it's only five o'clock."

"Never mind, dear," Miss Brown interrupted gently. "Your grandma may be asleep when it is your bedtime. Now run away like a good child."

But Peggy lingered.

"Wouldn't you like to kiss Maud good night, too, grandma?" she asked, timidly.

But Mrs. Lee did not answer. She had closed her eyes, and turned her face to the wall, and before Peggy could speak again Fraulein had taken her hand, and was leading her from the room.



Once outside her grandmother's room Peggy's feelings found vent in a burst of tears.

"Oh, Fraulein, Fraulein," she sobbed, clinging convulsively to the governess, "I know grandma's worse. She says she's better, but I'm quite sure she isn't, and oh, I'm so dreadfully frightened!"

Fraulein sat down on the stairs, and taking Peggy in her kind arms, kissed and comforted her until her tears ceased, and she was able to smile again. Then Fraulein proposed that they should go to find Maud, who must be feeling lonely all by herself.

They found that young lady seated among the branches of a cherry tree, which she had climbed, but after a little persuasion on Fraulein's part, she consented to descend to earth once more, and listen to a story book until supper time.

Neither Aunt Mary nor Miss Brown came down to supper, and the two little girls had it alone with Fraulein, who told them fairy stories, and did her best to keep them amused and happy. The doctor had arrived from town, and Peggy, who firmly believed that doctors could do anything in the way of curing people, was quite reassured about her grandmother's condi-



tion, and by the time supper was over she had cheered up sufficiently to enjoy a game of dominoes with Fraulein and Maud.

"I am sure grandma will be ever so much better in the morning," were Peggy's last words that night, as Fraulein was tucking her up in bed; to which assertion Fraulein made no answer, but turned her head away quickly that the little girl might not see the tears in her eyes.

Peggy's first thought on waking next morning was of her grandmother, and she sat up in bed, listening anxiously for any unusual sounds in the house. But everything was very still and peaceful. Outside the birds were singing and twittering, and through the open window came the fragrance of blossoms.

Springing out of bed, Peggy ran across the floor in her bare feet, and knocked at the door of Fraulein's room, which communicated with her own. There was no answer, and after waiting a moment, she softly turned the handle and peeped in. The room was empty; Fraulein was not there.

"How very queer," Peggy said to herself. "She never likes to get up early, and I don't believe it's seven o'clock yet. I wonder where she can be."



With a sudden determination to find out for herself, she hastened to the closet in quest of wrapper and bath slippers, and she had just finished putting them on when the door was pushed violently open from the outside, and Maud, still in her night-gown and bare feet, her eyes round with excitement, burst into the room.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're awake," she exclaimed in an awed whisper, closing the door behind her, and springing into the warm bed her cousin had just vacated. "Mamma says I'm to stay here, and we're neither of us to come out till she or Fraulein tells us we can. Oh, Peggy, isn't it awful? I'm so scared."

"How's grandma?" demanded Peggy, a sudden fear making her feel cold and faint.

Maud's eyes opened wider still in her surprise.

"Don't you know?" she inquired incredulously. "Haven't they told you?"

"No," faltered Peggy; "I just woke up. Oh, Maud, is grandma worse?"

"She's dead," said Maud solemnly. "She died last night, but they didn't want to wake us. They've telegraphed for papa, and the funeral's to be day after to-morrow."



## CHAPTER II

### THE CHANGES BEGIN

**P**EGGY, Peggy, where are you?"

At the sound of Maud's shrill voice Peggy lifted her head from the sofa cushion. She had been crying quietly for the past half-hour in a corner of the library sofa, and her head was beginning to ache.

"I'm here," she called, huskily, and next moment Maud came running into the room.

"What have you been doing?" she demanded, impatiently. "I've been looking everywhere for you."

"I've been—oh, I don't know; I just came in here because it was quiet. I've got a headache."

"That's too bad, but I guess it'll be all right when you come outdoors. I've been having such larks with Li-Chang. He's the funniest little China boy I ever saw. I bet I could beat him in a race down to the end of the grove, and I did, too. It was great fun, but mamma saw



me, and called me in. She said I oughtn't to run races the day after grandma's funeral, and then she told me the most interesting news. Guess what it is!"

"I can't," said Peggy, indifferently. She was rather shocked at Maud's frank admission of how she had been amusing herself. She did not feel in the least like romping that day.

"We're all coming here to spend the summer," announced Maud, triumphantly.

Peggy gave a little gasp. This was news indeed, and for the moment she scarcely knew whether she ought to be glad or sorry. She rather liked Maud, in spite of her hoydenish ways, and Aunt Mary and Uncle George were always kind, but Dick and Charlie—— She remembered the one occasion when Aunt Mary had brought her two little boys for a visit, and how at the end of a week grandma—who was not very fond of boys—had requested that they should be sent home again.

"Mamma has been telling me all about it," Maud went on, without observing her cousin's dismay. "She and papa are going home on Monday to pack, and I'm to stay here with you and Fraulein. Then at the end of the week mamma's coming back with the boys and some



of the servants, and papa will come as often as he can get away from his business."

"Do you think you will like to stay here all summer?" Peggy inquired anxiously, recalling her cousin's oft-repeated complaints about the dullness of her grandmother's home.

"Oh, yes, I guess so; it will be all right when the boys come, and I can have some fun. Papa is going to send the ponies, and this isn't such a bad place when you get used to it."

"Will your governess come too?" Peggy asked.

"Oh, Miss Leroy, the governess we have now, is going to leave. Papa had a row with her since mamma and I have been here. She shook Charlie—think of that; actually shook him—and papa and mamma never allow us to be punished in that way."

"Was Charlie very naughty?" Peggy inquired, with interest.

"No, not very. He didn't want to stay in the house and study, and when she told him he had to, he put out his tongue at her; that's all. She hadn't any business to shake him for a little thing like that. Papa told her he never allowed any one to punish us, and she said she would leave at the end of the month. Mamma isn't



very sorry. She says she never thought Miss Leroy was a very good teacher, and as long as Fraulein is here there won't be any trouble, as she can just as well teach us all. I think that will be fine. Fraulein's so meek, I don't believe she could possibly boss any one."

"I don't believe she would like it if Charlie put his tongue out at her, though," said Peggy, doubtfully. "Does he often do things like that?"

"Oh, no. Charlie's very good, except when people won't let him have his own way. We're all like that; we can't bear being made to do things."

"But don't all children have to mind?" inquired Peggy, wonderingly. "I always had to mind grandma and Fraulein."

"Oh, of course they do sometimes; in big things, you know, like running in front of trolleys, or going in sail-boats when it's rough; but not little nagging things, like washing hands and learning lessons. Papa says he won't have us nagged."

"It must be very nice to always do just what you want to," said Peggy, "but grandma said children must be brought up to mind."



"Grandma was an old fuss," retorted Maud, cheerfully. "Papa said she was."

"She was not," cried Peggy, springing to her feet, with flashing eyes and burning cheeks. "You sha'n't say such things about my own precious grandma. She was the very best lady in the world, and I'm glad she made me mind. I don't believe children who don't mind are at all nice, so there!"

"Well, I declare, if you haven't got a temper!" exclaimed Maud, her eyes opening wide in genuine astonishment. "I'd be ashamed to fly out like that just for nothing at all."

"It isn't nothing at all. It's very wicked to say things about people when they're dead, and besides, it isn't true. Oh, grandma, grandma!" And poor little Peggy broke down completely, and rushed out of the room, crying as if her heart would break.

Half blinded by tears and rage, the little girl stumbled in through the hall until she ran plump into her aunt, who had just come down stairs.

"Peggy, my dear child," remonstrated Aunt Mary gently; "why don't you look where you are going? Why, what's the matter, dear—what are you crying about?"



"It's Maud," sobbed Peggy, her indignation rising again at sight of Maud's mother. "She's a wicked girl, and—and I don't want her to stay here all summer."

"Peggy!" There was reproof as well as astonishment in Aunt Mary's tone now.

Peggy's eyes drooped. For the first time she remembered grandma's instructions about being polite to visitors.

"I—I don't mean that exactly," she faltered penitently, "but, oh, Aunt Mary, she did say such dreadful things, and I was so angry."

"What did she say?" Mrs. Eliot inquired anxiously. She was a gentle, timid little woman, and as Maud said, generally let her children do about as they liked.

Peggy hesitated.

"I don't think—that is, perhaps I ought not to tell you," she said. "Wouldn't it be telling tales?"

Mrs. Eliot looked relieved.

"Perhaps it would," she said smiling. "At any rate, I won't ask, but, Peggy dear, I am very sorry to see you have such a temper. Maud has her faults, but she never gets in a rage. Now run off and play. You little cousins must



be great friends, you know, because you are going to live together now."

"Am I to live with you in San Francisco?" Peggy inquired, her lip beginning to tremble again.

"Yes; we shall probably go back there next autumn, but we are all coming here to spend the summer. Won't you be glad to have Maud and Dick and Charlie to play with?"

"I don't know," said Peggy, doubtfully. "I never had any children to play with, and I didn't mind. When you go back to San Francisco, can't I stay here with Fraulein? I always lived here."

"I know you did, dear, but changes have to come in all our lives, and now that dear grandma isn't here any longer, of course you must live with us. This house will be yours when you are older, because grandma has left it to you in her will, but little girls always live with their relations, you know."

"Then why can't I go and live with Edith and Harry? They're my relations."

"Because they are too young to be burdened with the care of a little girl. It is more natural that you should stay with us, and have children



of your own age to play with. Now run away, and don't ask any more questions, for I am very busy. Go and find Maud, and tell her you are sorry you quarrelled with her."

"Mayn't I go upstairs and stay with Fraulein? I'm afraid I don't feel very sorry yet, but perhaps I shall by and by."

"Oh, go anywhere you like, only don't sulk. Nobody likes a sulky little girl, you know." And Aunt Mary hurried away, leaving her little niece to her own devices.

Peggy found Fraulein in the school-room, writing letters, but at sight of her little pupil she looked up with a kind smile, and at her first words the child's grief broke forth afresh.

"I want grandma—oh, Fraulein, I do want her so much," sobbed the poor little girl, flinging herself into Fraulein's arms, and the governess, understanding better than Aunt Mary, soothed and comforted her until she was calm again.

"Do you know about what's going to happen, Fraulein?" Peggy asked, when the tears had been dried, and she was sitting comfortably curled up in Fraulein's lap. "All the Eliots are coming here to spend the summer."



"I know, dearest; your aunt has told me."

"And aren't you sorry?"

Fraulein smiled and shook her head.

"We must not be sorry," she said, cheerfully, "for it will be pleasant for you to have the little cousins to play with. It will keep you from being too lonely without the dear grandmother."

"I sha'n't like it at all," said Peggy; "I'm quite sure I sha'n't. You weren't here the time Dick and Charlie came before, and you don't know what horrid boys they are. Dick is the biggest; he's twelve, but Charlie is just as bad, though he's only nine. They teased my kitty, and smashed one of the plate glass windows in the conservatory, and broke down grandma's flowers. We were so uncomfortable while they were here, and grandma stayed in bed a whole day after they went away."

Fraulein laughed.

"Perhaps they have improved," she said, encouragingly. "Let us hope they have if they are to be my pupils. Now suppose we go downstairs and find Maud. She must be lonely all by herself."

Peggy rose reluctantly.

"I suppose we've got to," she said, with a



sigh, "but I don't feel one bit like playing to-day. Did your heart ever feel as if it had the toothache, Fraulein?"

"It has indeed felt that way, my darling," said Fraulein, and bending down, she kissed the wistful little face very tenderly.

Maud was swinging disconsolately in the hammock on the piazza. She evidently bore no malice, for at sight of her cousin her face brightened, and she greeted Peggy quite as if nothing had happened.

"Say, Peggy," she called cheerfully; "there's the prettiest bird in that tree at the end of the piazza. I think he must have a nest there."

"He has," said Peggy, much relieved by her cousin's evident intention to ignore past differences. "They are a pair of orioles, and there are five eggs in the nest. Fraulein says we mustn't make too much noise, or we may frighten them away. I love birds, don't you?"

"Oh, pretty well. We mustn't let the boys find out about that nest, or they'll steal the eggs. Charlie is making a collection, and he pounces on every nest he finds."

"What a cruel boy!" began Peggy. Then checked herself, and added with an effort——

"I'll play horse if you want me to—that is,



unless you'd just as lief play with the dolls."

"I hate dolls, but horse is all right. Come along." And Maud sprang out of the hammock with alacrity.

"Maud," said Peggy, half an hour later, when the two little girls, hot and breathless from their romp, had seated themselves in the shade of a palm tree to rest; "Aunt Mary told me to tell you I was sorry we quarrelled, but I didn't do it, because I wasn't sorry then. I don't think I'm exactly sorry now, but I'll say so if you want me to."

"Oh, I don't care," returned Maud, good-naturedly; "you needn't if you don't want to, and maybe I oughtn't have said that about grandma, because she's dead. It's true just the same, though. Oh, there goes Li-Chang; I want to ask him something." And away flew Maud, quite unconscious of the fact that, at her last words Peggy's color had risen again, and her eyes were flashing.



## CHAPTER III

### THE ORIOLE'S NEST

**I** SUPPOSE boys must be good for something, or God wouldn't have made them, because you said everything He made was good for something, even snakes and mosquitoes; but they are dreadfully disagreeable things to have in the house."

Peggy made this statement in a tone of weary conviction, as she flung herself into the big school-room rocker, and scrubbed her heated brow with her handkerchief. Fraulein looked up from her sewing and laughed, notwithstanding the fact that she herself was not feeling particularly cheerful that morning. Three troublesome pupils had been added to her many other cares, and life was not proving either easy or agreeable. But Fraulein was a brave little woman, and there were her mother and invalid sister to be considered, so she smiled in spite of the heartache, and inquired cheerfully——



"What have you been doing to make you so warm? I heard so much noise that I thought you must all be having a merry time together."

"Maybe the others thought it was fun, but I didn't," said Peggy, mournfully. "Oh, Fraulein dear, I do wish Dick and Charlie hadn't come. I was getting quite fond of Maud, and she was beginning to like me a little, too, but ever since day before yesterday, when the boys came, she hasn't been any good at all. She wants to romp all the time, and because it makes my side ache to run fast they all laugh at me. Then Dick teases so. He dared me to climb a cherry tree, and when I said I wouldn't do it for anything in the world, he called me a 'fraid-cat. Then the others laughed. I think it was very rude indeed."

"I do not believe your cousins mean to be unkind to you," said Fraulein, suppressing a sigh, "but they are very wild and untrained. Perhaps they will behave better after they have settled down."

"No, they won't," said Peggy, with conviction. "Maud says they're always like this, and Aunt Mary can't make them mind at all. I thought fathers and mothers always made their children mind."



"Children should obey their parents," said Fraulein, evading a direct reply.

"That's what grandma said, and I always had to mind her, but the Eliots don't mind Aunt Mary at all. I used to think grandma was strict sometimes, but I guess it's better to be a little strict than the way Aunt Mary is."

"Suppose you come and lie on the sofa, and let me read to you for a little while," Fraulein suggested, by way of changing the subject. "You look quite tired out."

Peggy readily agreed to this plan, and had soon forgotten weariness and annoyance in the fascinating pages of a new book. At the end of half an hour Maud appeared, hot and breathless, and holding up a great jagged tear in her dress, for Fraulein's inspection.

"It caught on a nail in the stable, and just tore itself," she explained tranquilly. "Mamma says she thinks you can mend it."

"And what were you doing in the stable?" Fraulein inquired, gravely. "Stables are not proper places for little girls to play in."

"I think they are very proper places indeed," retorted Maud, pertly. "We always play in the stable at home. I wish you'd please hurry and mend my dress; the boys are waiting for me."



"You will have to take it off," said Fraulein, with decision, and she insisted on removing the torn dress, despite all Maud's grumbling protestations, that it didn't in the least matter how it was mended, and she could just draw it together anyhow.

"What a disagreeable person Fraulein is," observed Maud, when the governess had left the room, taking the dress with her.

"I don't think she's at all disagreeable, and I love her very much indeed," declared Peggy, indignantly.

Maud shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I suppose she's all right with you," she admitted. "You're such a soft, meek little thing, and you always do just what people tell you to; but we don't like her at all. What's more, we don't intend to have her boss us."

"She's going to be your governess, and you'll have to mind her then."

Maud laughed scornfully.

"You just wait and see, that's all. We never have minded a governess and we're not going to begin now. We were talking about it after you went in. Dick says she's a cross-eyed old maid."

"She isn't cross-eyed, and Dick is a very rude



boy. I don't believe he'll grow up to be a gentleman."

"What will he be, then?" demanded Maud, the color deepening in her cheeks.

"I don't know, but I'm sure boys who say such rude things about ladies can't be gentlemen, even if their relations are."

"And what about girls who call their cousins bad names——what will they grow up to be?"

Peggy's eyes drooped, but she said nothing, and in a moment Maud went on.

"The boys think you're an awful baby, anyhow, and they don't care one bit about you."

"Why don't they leave me alone, then? Why do they keep teasing me and bothering me all the time?"

"Oh, all boys tease, I guess, and of course when they see you mind, it makes them do it all the more. They try to tease me sometimes, but I never let them see I care, and they soon stop. They're not bad really, but people must have fun. What did you do before I came? It doesn't seem as if you could ever have had any good times at all."

"I had lovely times," said Peggy, indignantly. "I had my dolls, and I drove with grandma,



and Fraulein read to me, and when grandma had visitors they were always very kind, and some of them brought me presents. Oh, I was very happy till grandma was ill, and you and Aunt Mary came."

"Well, that is polite! I suppose you mean mamma and I spoiled all your stupid old fun. I'll tell her what you said."

Peggy blushed.

"I didn't mean that exactly," she stammered, "but everything was different, and——oh, Maud, I do miss grandma very much." And Peggy began to cry.

"What a cry-baby you are," remarked Maud, contemptuously. "You're always crying about something or other. Dick says he can stand anything in the world better than a cry-baby or a 'fraid-cat. Oh, I say; Fraulein's left the key in her old desk. I'm going to rummage."

"But you can't; you haven't any right to touch Fraulein's things when she isn't here. She wouldn't like it at all."

"Who cares whether she likes it or not? If she leaves her old keys round, she must expect people to look at her things."

As she spoke Maud sauntered slowly towards the desk. It is doubtful if she really intended



to do what she suggested, but the sight of Peggy's shocked face was too much for her, and the inclination to tease was irresistible. But for once Peggy was too quick for her. With one bound she had reached the desk, snatched the key from the lock, and deposited it in her pocket.

"There!" she cried, triumphantly; "now you can't touch it, and I'll tell Fraulein to hide the key the minute she comes back."

For a moment Maud was really too much astonished to speak. In all their little differences this was the first time Peggy had ever asserted herself, and in her heart she liked her cousin none the less for what she had done; but the spirit of mischief was strong within her, and so she pretended to be more angry than she really was.

"If you don't give me that key I'll do something you won't like," she declared threateningly.

"I don't care what you do," returned Peggy, her blood warming with the consciousness of victory. "You sha'n't meddle with Fraulein's things."

"Oh, you don't care. Well, suppose I tell Charlie where that oriole's nest is."



The color went suddenly out of Peggy's face, and she clasped her hands nervously.

"You wouldn't do that," she said, anxiously. "You couldn't be so mean."

"Oh, couldn't I, though? You just wait and see. Give me that key, and I won't tell; cross my heart I won't. I'll promise and when I once promise a thing I never break my word."

"I won't give you the key," said Peggy, stoutly. "You haven't any right to open Fraulein's desk."

"All right; then I'll tell Charlie where that nest is. He'd love to get the eggs."

"But the little ones will be out in a few days," cried Peggy, "and they'll be so cunning. and the father and mother birds will be so happy. Oh, Maud, you wouldn't tell Charlie; he's such a cruel boy!"

Now Maud was very fond of her brothers, and she resented the fact that one of them should be spoken of as cruel. Her heart hardened towards her timid little cousin in consequence.

"It isn't cruel to steal birds' eggs," she declared. "All boys do it, and girls, too, sometimes. I've stolen—I mean I would steal some if I happened to want them for a collection. Give me that key, and I won't tell Charlie."



"No, I won't," said Peggy, firmly.

At that moment a familiar voice called from under the school-room window——

"I say, Maud, what are you doing up there so long? Dick says if you don't hurry we'll go fishing by ourselves."

It is probable that if Maud had taken time to think she would never have revealed Peggy's secret, for she was not naturally either cruel or unkind, but the sound of Charlie's voice just at that unfortunate moment, coupled with the anger caused by her cousin's remark, proved too much for her, and before the horrified Peggy could stop her she had darted to the open window.

"Charlie," she shouted, "Charlie, listen; I've got something to tell you. Peggy told me not to, but she's real mean, and I'm going to. There's an oriole's nest, with five eggs in it, in the syringa bush right at the end of the piazza. There! you see I told you I'd tell," she added, turning in mischievous triumph on her cousin, but Peggy had left the room.

Down the stairs flew the little girl, out on to the broad piazza, and when, three minutes later, Charlie, filled with pleasant anticipations of an addition to his collection, reached the syringa



bush, he found it guarded by a resolute little figure, who faced him, with eyes flashing defiance in every glance.

"Hello!" exclaimed Charlie, stopping short in the path, and eyeing his cousin curiously; "what are you doing here, 'fraid-cat? I thought you had a side-ache, and had to go in to Dutchy to be coddled."

"Charlie," said Peggy, making a great effort to speak pleasantly, though her voice was shaking with indignation; "you're not really a wicked, cruel boy, are you?"

"Of course I'm not. Who said I was?"

"No one—oh, no one at all; only I was afraid you might be, because you like to tease, you know. You wouldn't really be so wicked as to steal poor little birds' eggs."

"Oh," said Charlie, in a tone of comprehension, and his eyes began to twinkle with mischief. "Well, maybe I am wicked then, but I'm not a 'fraid-cat anyhow. I'm not a mean sneak either. Nobody who wasn't a mean sneak would be horrid enough not to tell a fellow where he could find something he wanted for his collection. If you don't want to see me hook those eggs you'd better scoot right now, for I'm going to do it this minute."



Peggy gave a little gasp, and it seemed to her as if all the blood in her body had suddenly rushed up into her face and neck. She had had one triumph that day, and she was warming with the excitement of battle.

"You sha'n't touch that nest," she said coolly.

"Oh, sha'n't I? How are you going to prevent it?"

"I don't know yet, but you sha'n't touch it. Oh, Charlie, please do be a good boy, and go away this once. The little ones will be out in a day or two, and the father and mother are so happy about it."

Charlie laughed scornfully.

"Happy about it! Oh, you goose! Just as if birds had feelings like people."

"How do you know they haven't?" demanded Peggy, winking hard to keep back the tears.

"Of course I know. I'm not a baby, if you are. Now get out of the way; I'm coming."

Just what happened next Peggy could never afterwards exactly remember. There was a rush, a struggle, and then she was clinging to her cousin, with all her strength, fighting, kicking, scratching, holding him back by sheer force





“ You wicked children, stop this minute ! ” — *Page 49.*







of her strong little arms. Charlie was a big boy for his age, and he too fought with all his might, but he was more than a year younger than Peggy, and astonishment at the unexpected attack had for the moment almost taken away his breath. Suddenly, there was a shrill scream, and Maud, still without her dress, and waving her bare arms wildly in the air, burst upon the scene.

“Oh, you wicked children, stop this minute, or I’ll call mamma! Peggy Lee, I believe you’ve ’most killed Charlie. Look at his face; it’s all scratched to pieces, and his nose is bleeding. Charlie, stop kicking Peggy; that’s no fair way to fight!”

With a sweep of her resolute arm, Maud thrust the panting, gasping combatants apart, and next moment Peggy, with a wild sob of despair, had turned and fled into the house.

Fraulein on her way back to the school-room, with Maud’s mended dress, was suddenly transfixed with horror and amazement, at sight of a little figure, with torn skirts and tumbled hair, rushing blindly up the front steps, and flinging itself into her arms.

“Oh, Fraulein,” gasped Peggy, clinging frantically to the governess, and shaking from head



to foot with nervous excitement; "I think I've 'most killed Charlie. I made his nose bleed, and his face is all scratched. I don't believe I can ever be a lady after this, but I'm afraid I'm not very sorry."

Here, Peggy's over-strained nerves gave way, and she burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing, that nearly frightened the gentle little governess out of her wits.



## CHAPTER IV

### AUNT MARY CHANGES HER MIND

**I**T was very quiet in the school-room, and Peggy—who was lying on the sofa, in her wrapper—had been alternately dozing, and listening to the birds outside the open window, for a good part of the afternoon. It was Sunday, and for two whole days the little girl had not been downstairs. The excitement caused by her battle with Charlie, had culminated in a sharp feverish attack, which had alarmed both Fraulein and Aunt Mary very much. The doctor had been summoned, and had recommended absolute quiet, and freedom from all excitement, for several days.

“She is very nervous and high-strung,” Peggy heard him saying to Aunt Mary, as the two left the room together, “and she has been through a good deal lately.”

Peggy wondered what “high-strung” meant, but her head was aching too much for her to



think very long about anything, and there was great comfort in the knowledge that she would not be obliged to see any of her cousins again for several days. She was heartily ashamed of her outburst of temper, and it was not until Fraulein had assured her over and over again, that Charlie was not seriously injured, that she could be persuaded to take some nourishment, and try to go to sleep.

"It was such a dreadfully unladylike thing to do," she said, mournfully. "I don't believe grandma could ever love me again if she knew it."

Every one was very kind. Even Aunt Mary did not utter a word of reproof, which Peggy considered very magnanimous on her part, considering she was Charlie's own mother; but the child still shrank with nervous dread from resuming her place in the family circle, and was, in consequence, rather disposed to exaggerate her symptoms. Accordingly, when Fraulein—who had been writing her usual Sunday letter to her mother in Germany—came softly over to the sofa, to inquire if she wanted anything, she pressed her hand to her forehead, with a sigh.

"Don't you feel a little better this afternoon?" the governess inquired, anxiously, taking one of



Peggy's hands, which certainly felt much cooler than it had done the day before.

"N—no," said Peggy, doubtfully; "at least, I'm not sure. My head feels rather queer when I try to sit up."

"Don't try, then; just lie still and rest. Shall I read to you?"

"Yes, please. I think I'd like to have you read 'A Little Son Of Sunshine.' There's a girl in that story, who was pretty naughty, and I feel as if I'd rather hear about bad people than good ones. It makes me so dreadfully ashamed when I read about good people now."

"You poor little one," said Fraulein, smiling. "You are not often naughty, Heaven knows."

"I didn't use to be," said Peggy, mournfully, "but I'm afraid I'm getting worse. I think if the Eliots stay here all summer I shall be very bad indeed by the time they leave. I don't want to be bad; I truly don't; but you can't think how dreadful it is when that temper feeling comes. I get hot all over, and it seems as if I must do something wicked. The first time I felt that way was the day after grandma's funeral, when Maud said something that wasn't nice. Then I felt it again when she tried to open your desk, and called you a—I won't say



what, because that would be telling tales. Then when Charlie was going to steal the oriole's eggs, it got worse. Oh, Fraulein, do you suppose if it goes on getting worse and worse, I might kill some one some time?"

Peggy's voice had sunk to a frightened whisper, and her eyes were big with fear, but Fraulein smiled reassuringly.

"No, no, my child, I am sure you will not," she said, soothingly, "but you must pray to God, and ask him to take such feelings away from you."

"I will," said Peggy, softly; "but, oh, Fraulein dear, if Dick and Charlie go on teasing me, and doing dreadful things, I'm so afraid I shan't be able to help getting into rages. You don't know how glad I felt when I hurt Charlie that day. I really was glad for a few minutes."

"But afterwards you were very unhappy."

"Of course I was. I suppose even murderers are unhappy afterwards. Are you sure Charlie is really quite all right again?"

"Quite sure. Haven't you heard him shouting in the garden?"

"Yes, but I think Charlie might shout even if there were something dreadful the matter with him. Do you think he will ever forgive me for



scratching his face and making his nose bleed?"

Fraulein laughed in spite of herself.

"I think he has forgiven you already," she said. "He really seemed much troubled the first night you were ill, and they all kept quiet—that is, quiet for them."

"Where are they all to-day?" Peggy inquired, with interest. "I haven't heard any noise in ever so long."

"They drove in to town to church, and stayed at luncheon at the hotel, with some friends from the East. Your aunt thought it best to take all the children, as the doctor wishes you to be kept quiet. Now shall I read to you for a while?"

Peggy consented, and spent the next hour very pleasantly, listening to the interesting adventures of Betty and Christopher in "A Little Son Of Sunshine." Then the sound of wheels was heard on the drive outside, and was quickly followed by the patter of little feet on the piazza.

"They've come back," said Peggy with a sigh. "How many more days do you suppose the doctor will let me stay up here, Fraulein?"

Fraulein looked troubled.

"Don't you want to hurry and get well?" she asked, anxiously.

"N—no, I don't think I do. It's so nice to



just lie here, and have you read to me, and bring me good things to eat. I should like some cream toast and some shredded pineapple for my supper."

"I'm afraid you are getting very lazy," said Fraulein, laughing. "Ah, here comes Mrs. Eliot. She will tell us whether she considers shredded pineapple wholesome food for little sick girls."

Aunt Mary came in, looking rather tired, but she greeted her little niece very kindly, and after presenting her with a bunch of beautiful white lilies—which they had gathered on their way home—took the place by the sofa—which Fraulein had vacated—and inquired pleasantly how Peggy had been amusing herself.

"I've had a very nice time," said the little girl. "I slept a good while first, and then Fraulein brought me Dorothea, and I dressed her in her Sunday clothes. After that I had my dinner, and then I went to sleep again. Now Fraulein's been reading to me for ever so long."

Mrs. Eliot looked puzzled.

"You are a queer child," she said. "I think it would almost break Maud's heart to have to lie still for a whole day, but you don't seem to object in the least."



"I think I rather like being ill," said Peggy, cheerfully. "How much longer can I stay up here, Aunt Mary?"

"Not much, I think. Dr. Scott told me this morning that there is no reason why you shouldn't come downstairs whenever you feel like it."

"O dear!" said Peggy, and she looked so disappointed that Aunt Mary laughed.

"You funny little girl," she said. "Well, you will have to come down pretty soon, for we want you to have a change."

"A change," repeated Peggy—"do you mean I am going away?"

"Do you think you would like to go away?"

Aunt Mary spoke rather wistfully. She was really fond of her brother's little girl, and it grieved her that Peggy and her cousins did not get on better together.

"I think I should like it very much," said Peggy, honestly. "Of course I would come back after a while, and—and you wouldn't mind very much, would you, Aunt Mary?"

"I would try not to mind if it were for your good. The fact is, Peggy, I am afraid you are not very happy here, with Maud and the boys."

"I like Maud pretty well sometimes," said



Peggy, blushing. "She was really quite nice before Dick and Charlie came."

Aunt Mary sighed.

"I am afraid my little girl is rather rough and thoughtless at times," she said. "You see, she has played with boys all her life, and that makes a difference; but her father and I feel sure she will be a fine woman some day. Now, Peggy, I want to talk to you about a plan I have made, and remember, dear, you are not obliged to go away at all unless you really want to. I had quite a long talk with Dr. Scott this morning. He says you are nervous, and not very strong, and he recommends an entire change of air and scene. Now how would you like to go East, and make your sister and brother a visit?"

"Aunt Mary, you don't mean it—you don't really mean that I can!"

Mrs. Eliot was amazed at the sudden radiance that lit up the pale little face. Peggy's eyes were sparkling, and she was actually trembling with excitement.

"Why, my dear, I never dreamed you would care so much," she said, bending to kiss her little niece as she spoke. "You haven't seen Edith or Harry since you were such a baby. I didn't suppose you remembered them very well."



"I don't," said Peggy, "but I love them, especially Edith. Oh, Aunt Mary, is it really true? Am I really going to see my own precious sister?" And to Aunt Mary's astonishment, Peggy suddenly threw her arms round her neck, and burst into tears.

Two hours later Peggy was comfortably tucked up in bed for the night, though far too happy and excited to think of going to sleep. She could not remember ever being quite so happy before in her life, and she lay trying to realize this wonderful, beautiful thing that was going to happen, and hugging her faithful confidant, Dorothea, to her breast.

"Just think, Dorothea, I'm going to see her," she whispered rapturously. "It seems as if it couldn't be true, but Aunt Mary says it is. We're to start on Thursday. Aunt Mary says it seems very sudden, but those friends of hers she went to see at the hotel to-day are starting for New York then, and they've offered to take me with them. If I didn't go now I might have to wait ever so long, for of course I couldn't take such a long journey all by myself. It takes days and days, you know, Dorothea, and we shall have to go to bed on the train. Won't that be funny? Aunt Mary is going to write to Edith



to-morrow, to let her know I'm coming, and she says Harry will meet us in New York, and take us to Montclair, New Jersey. Oh, Dorothea, I'm so happy, and just think how happy Edith and Harry will be when they know they're going to see their own little sister."

There was a slight rustle at the door, and a voice inquired in an eager whisper——

"Peggy, I say, Peggy, are you asleep?"

"No," said Peggy, raising herself on her elbow. "Is that you, Maud?"

For answer a little figure ran swiftly across the floor, and bounded on to the bed, like a rubber ball.

"We've got to whisper," Maud explained, "because mamma and Fraulein don't know I'm here. Mamma said I must be quiet, so as not to disturb you, but I thought perhaps you might not be asleep, and I knew if you weren't you'd like to hear about the orioles. The little ones came out to-day, and they're just as cunning as they can be."

"The orioles!" Peggy repeated, in joyful incredulity; "then Charlie didn't——"

"No, he didn't," said Maud, emphatically. "I wouldn't let him, for one thing, but I don't believe he'd have done it any way, after he found



out how much you cared. Charlie's mischievous, but he isn't really mean. Besides, he and Dick both like you ever so much better than they did at first. They've promised they won't call you baby or 'fraid-cat any more."

"It's very queer," said Peggy in a puzzled tone. "I thought you would all despise me for having such a dreadful temper. That's one reason why I didn't want to come downstairs."

"Well, I suppose a temper is a pretty bad thing to have," Maud admitted, "but Dick says it shows you got spunk, and that's better than being a 'fraid-cat. Boys can't stand people who cry and are scared of things. I told Dick I was sure Winifred Hamilton was that kind—she looks so meek, and says she loves dolls—but he says he knows she isn't. He thinks she's the prettiest girl he ever saw, so I suppose that's the reason."

"Does Winifred Hamilton belong to the people you went to see at the hotel to-day?" Peggy inquired, with interest.

"Yes, she's Mrs. Hamilton's little girl, and she's ten and a half; just your age. You'll know her pretty soon, because mamma says you're going East with the Hamiltons on Thursday."



“Yes, I am; isn’t it exciting? Are the Hamiltons kind people?”

“Oh, yes, very. Mrs. Hamilton used to be our governess when she lived in San Francisco, and we liked her better than any one we ever had. That was when her husband was in prison.”

“In prison!” gasped Peggy; “what did he have to go to prison for?”

“Oh, he was all right,” said Maud, reassuringly. “People thought he’d stolen some money from a bank, and he was put in prison for it, but the man who really took the money confessed just before he died, so they let Mrs. Hamilton’s husband out. We never saw him till to-day, or Winifred either. She used to live in the East with her uncle, and after Mr. Hamilton got out of prison they moved to New York. That was a year ago last winter, and now they’ve only come to California on business. O dear! here comes that tiresome Fraulein. Now I shall catch it.”

But Fraulein was not disposed to be severe. Perhaps her heart was too heavy at the prospect of losing her little pupil, or perhaps the sight of Peggy’s radiant face disarmed her. At any rate, she did not scold, and at Peggy’s earnest en-



treaty, allowed the two little cousins to spend the next half hour together.

"I wonder why people seem so much nicer when you're going away from them," Peggy remarked, speculatively, when Maud had gone away, and Fraulein was smoothing out the bed-clothes for the night. "I never liked Maud half so much before. Do you suppose I might even get to like Dick and Charlie too, if I tried very hard?"

Fraulein smiled, and then she sighed.

"We must try to love every one," she said, in her gentle, patient voice. "Now, my darling, you really must go to sleep, or you will not be well enough for your long journey by Thursday, and think how sad that would be."



## CHAPTER V

### PEGGY STARTS FOR THE EAST

**I**T was Thursday morning; Peggy's trunk was packed; all the servants, including Li-Chang, had been bidden an affectionate farewell, and the four little cousins were standing on the piazza, waiting for the carriage, which was to take Aunt Mary and Peggy in to town.

"It does give a person a very queer feeling to say good-bye to so many people," remarked Peggy, with a catch in her voice. "I thought I was so happy that I wouldn't mind about anything, but I don't like saying good-bye."

"Don't say it, then," advised practical Dick. "Just hop into the carriage when it comes, and don't say a word to anybody."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be polite," said Peggy, doubtfully. "I won't mind saying it to you quite so much, because you've only been here a little while, but I can't bear to say it to Fraulein."

"That old Dutchy seems to care a lot about



you," observed Charlie, who had perched himself on the piazza railing, and was calmly kicking the paint off with his heels. "She's been snivelling ever since she knew you were going. I've caught her at it when she didn't think any one was looking."

Peggy gave a little gasp, and winked very hard. She was anxious to stand well in the good graces of her cousins, and she remembered Maud's remark about what boys thought of people who cried.

"She's rather a good sort, isn't she?" Dick inquired, anxiously. "She doesn't look as if she would boss."

"Oh, she's very good indeed," said Peggy, eagerly. "I'm sure you'll all love her, but—but there's one thing I'd like to tell you if you wouldn't mind."

"Fire away," said Dick good-naturedly.

"Well, it's only that I think she might be more fond of you if you would stop calling her that horrid name."

"What name, Dutchy?"

"Yes," said Peggy, blushing. "It really isn't a nice one, you know, and I'm sure she doesn't like it. She says the Germans and the Dutch are two different races."



"Oh, bosh! what difference does that make? We always have names for our governesses. Mrs. Hamilton used to be Hammie, and she didn't mind a bit."

"Well, of course you can do as you like about it," said Peggy, with a sigh; "but don't you think Fraulein is a prettier name than Dutchy?"

"No, I don't," returned Dick, with decision; and then Maud, feeling that perhaps the argument had lasted long enough, proposed that Peggy should go and have a last look at the oriole's nest.

"We'll be very quiet," she promised, "so as not to scare them."

So the two little girls tiptoed off to the end of the piazza, followed, somewhat to their surprise, by Charlie, who, at the first mention of the oriole's nest, had jumped down from the railing. Dick elected to remain behind, and watch for the carriage.

"Charlie," whispered Peggy, impulsively, as they turned away after inspecting the bird family, "are you sure you're not angry with me for the dreadful things I did that day?"

"Oh, shucks!" retorted Charley, reddening, "that's all right. Look here," he added awkwardly; "I guess I won't hook any more eggs.



Maybe it is kind of mean, and I don't want to be mean."

"Oh, Charlie, I am so glad," cried Peggy, her eyes sparkling. "I don't believe you're really a bad boy, after all."

"Of course he isn't," declared Maud, indignantly, and she cast a glance of loving admiration after her brother, as that young gentleman walked away, looking rather shame-faced. Just then Dick called to them that the carriage was coming.

Notwithstanding all her good resolutions, Peggy did break down when the moment of parting came, and she clung to Fraulein with so much affection that the soft-hearted little German was quite overcome herself.

"Good-bye, my darling," she whispered, her own eyes full of tears. "Be very, very happy, but be sure to come back to us soon!"

"Of course she will come back," put in Aunt Mary, cheerfully. "This is only to be a visit, you know."

But Peggy shook her head.

"I may come some time to see you all," she said, "but I'm quite sure Edith won't let me go away again for good. I'll write to you very often, Fraulein dear, and perhaps by and by you



can come to Montclair, New Jersey, and be my governess again."

Then Aunt Mary hurried her into the carriage, and in another moment they were driving away from the only home that Peggy had known since she could remember.

As the horses trotted down the palm-bordered avenue, Peggy leaned forward, for one more look at the familiar house. Fraulein's handkerchief was at her eyes, and Maud was looking unusually solemn, but Dick and Charlie waved a cheerful farewell, and shouted "Good-bye, good-bye, Peggy!" until their voices were lost in the distance. Then suddenly Peggy's heart gave a queer little jump, and she caught Aunt Mary's hand nervously.

"What's the matter, dear?" Mrs. Eliot asked, kindly.

"Nothing's the matter, Aunt Mary, only—only, it seems so lonely. I think I'm just a little bit frightened."

"Don't you want to go—would you rather stay with us?"

Peggy shook her head resolutely.

"I want to go very much indeed," she said.

"I never wanted anything so much, but you see,



it's a little frightening to be going away from all the people I know. It'll be all right when I get to Edith, of course, but it's a long way to Montclair, New Jersey. Are you quite sure the Hamiltons are kind people?"

"Quite sure," said Aunt Mary, smiling reassuringly.

The drive to town was a rather silent one. Aunt Mary was never a very talkative person, and although Peggy was seldom at a loss for something to say, it seemed easier just then to lean back in her corner of the carriage, than to do anything else.

"She mightn't let me go if she knew I was 'frightened,'" she whispered to Dorothea—who was tightly clasped in her arms, "and if I talk much I'm afraid she'll find out."

But when they had reached the town, and were rattling through the busy streets, Peggy cheered up, and as the carriage stopped before the railway station, she was all eagerness to catch the first glimpse of her travelling companions.

"There they are," said Aunt Mary, and next moment Peggy was being introduced, to a tall gentleman, a sweet-faced lady, and one of the prettiest little girls she had ever seen.



They all greeted her kindly; the gentleman shook hands; the lady kissed her, and the little girl exclaimed joyfully——

“I’m so glad you’re coming with us. I’ve been so excited about it ever since mother told me.”

“I’m glad, too,” responded Peggy heartily, and she decided at once that the Hamiltons certainly were “kind people.” “Oh, you’ve got a doll, too,” she added, her face brightening at sight of the large French doll her new friend was carrying.

“Of course I have,” said Winifred Hamilton. “I couldn’t go all the way to California without one of my children. This is Rose-Florence; I brought her because she is the oldest child I have.”

While the two little girls were making friends, Mrs. Eliot was saying to Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton ——

“I hope my little niece won’t give you any trouble. I have written her sister when she will arrive in New York, and I am sure either she or her brother will be at the station to meet her. If there should be any mistake, however ——”

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” replied Mrs. Hamilton, cheerfully. “We will take good care



of the little girl, and see her safely in the hands of her friends. Now I think we had better be getting settled in the train, as it starts in ten minutes."

As the Pullman train moved slowly out of the station, and Peggy strained her eyes for one last glimpse of Aunt Mary's familiar face, the "frightening feeling" came over her again, and she clutched Dorothea tight, with a little sob; but next moment Winifred's kind little hand was slipped into hers, and Mrs. Hamilton was saying in her bright, pleasant voice——

"Now, little girls, come and help me get settled. This is going to be just like playing house, isn't it?"

"I don't wonder Maud said your mother was the nicest governess they ever had," Peggy remarked to Winifred that afternoon, when the two little girls were alone together, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton having gone to speak to some acquaintances in the next car. "She's the loveliest lady I ever knew except my sister."

"Of course she is," returned Winifred, with conviction. "Everybody loves mother. Don't you think I'm very fortunate to have such a nice one?"

"Yes, I do," assented Peggy. "Lots of peo-



ple have mothers, but they're not all like yours. Aunt Mary's ever so good to Maud and the boys, and she lets them do 'most anything they want to, but she doesn't understand things the way your mother does."

"She always understands things," said Winifred, flushing with pleasure. "All my friends are just crazy about her, and Gertie Rossiter says she'd give anything in the world to have her for her mother. Mrs. Rossiter is really quite a nice lady, and Lulu Bell says it's very ungrateful in Gertie to talk that way, but I suppose she can't help it. Is your sister a grown-up lady?"

"She's twenty," said Peggy, "and my brother is twenty-two. Would you like to hear a letter I got from my sister just before grandma died? I'll read it to you if you would."

Winifred said she would like it very much, so Peggy produced from her pocket the crumpled letter, and smoothing it out with loving fingers, read it for at least the fiftieth time.

"It's a very nice letter," Winifred declared, when her new friend had finished reading. "I suppose your sister is very anxious to see you. Mother says she used to want me so much all the time she was in California, and I was in New



York with Uncle Will, that sometimes she felt as if she would die if she had to bear it another day. She came all the way to New York to see me once, but I didn't know she was mother then; I thought she was just Mrs. Smith. I loved her, though, and was so sorry when she went away again after just one night. Then when she came for good, and I found out who she really was—oh, it was the most beautiful thing that ever happened to anybody!”

“Tell me about it,” said Peggy, eagerly. “It sounds very interesting; quite like a book thing.”

So Winifred told of her old life with her uncle and aunt, who, though very kind, were not like father and mother; of how all the world had changed for her since the return of her parents from California, and of the dear little home on the second floor of a New York apartment house. She told too, of her school and school friends.

“Of course I had to leave school to come to California,” she explained, “but mother wouldn't go without me, and father didn't want to go without her. Then Miss Lothrop, our teacher, said she thought I would learn more by traveling than if I stayed at home and went to school every day, so I came, and we've all had a lovely



time. I think California is a very beautiful place, don't you?"

"Yes," said Peggy, "but then, you see, I don't know much about any other places, because I've always lived here since I was four."

And then she told Winifred of her own family history; of how her papa and mamma had been drowned in a yachting accident, and she had been obliged to leave her dear sister and brother, and come to California to live with grandma; and of how her dear grandma had gone to Heaven too, and Aunt Mary and her family had come to live in her old home.

Before bedtime that night the two little girls were fast friends, and the days that followed were very happy ones to Peggy. It was very exciting to live on a train, and to travel on day after day, through ever-changing scenery, and surrounded by the kindest, pleasantest people she had ever known. Mrs. Hamilton, always quick to find out people's feelings, had soon discovered the longing for love and sympathy in Peggy's lonely little heart, and she petted and made much of the child in a way that speedily won her warmest affection. Grandma and Fraulein had always been very kind to her, but she



had never before known any one quite like Mrs. Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton, too, was very kind, and as for Winifred—Peggy was quite convinced Winifred must be the very nicest girl in the world.

“You see, you’re the first real friend I ever had,” she explained. “Of course there was Maud, but she was my cousin, and a cousin doesn’t seem just the same as a friend. Besides, we didn’t care at all about the same kind of things. It’s so lovely to know some one who loves dolls, and understands my feelings about them.”

Winifred, unlike Peggy, appeared to have a great many friends, and she never tired of talking about them. There was Lulu Bell, whose blind aunt was a real live authoress, and there were Betty and Jack Randall, who use to live in the same apartment house with the Hamiltons, and who were so poor that their mother had to give music lessons, until their uncle, “a truly English lord,—” came sailing across the ocean in his beautiful steam yacht, and took them all away to England, to live in a castle.

“That really was the most exciting thing that ever happened to us,” Winifred said. “We of-



ten get letters from Betty and Jack, and they tell us about all the beautiful things their uncle does for them. They each have a pony, and they ride every day. Jack used to be lame, but he had an operation, and he's quite well and strong now. The Bells are going to England to visit them some time."

So the pleasant days slipped away, and the long journey drew near its end. Long ago the palms and orange groves had been left behind, and the seemingly endless desert crossed. Then came the arrival at Chicago, where they left the train, and spent a night at a hotel. Peggy was much impressed by the high buildings, and the crowds of people in the streets, this being the first big city she had visited since she could remember. Winifred did not appear at all impressed, and informed her, with an air of pride, that New York was much bigger and noisier.

"I hope Montclair, New Jersey isn't," said Peggy, anxiously. "I think it would make my head ache to have to live in such a noisy place all the time."

Winifred assured her that she would soon get used to the noise, but she did not feel at all certain, and it was a satisfaction to learn from Mr. Hamilton, that Montclair was only a small town.



The next morning they were off again, and then Peggy's heart began to beat fast with excitement, for in one more day they would be in New York, and then——



## CHAPTER VI

### MISS LEE HAS A SURPRISE

THE train did not reach New York till late in the afternoon, and all that last day Peggy had sat very quiet, always holding Dorothea in her arms, but scarcely answering when her friends spoke to her. She ate very little at luncheon, and when Mrs. Hamilton inquired anxiously if she did not feel well, she replied——

“I think I feel well, but there’s something very queer the matter with my throat. I can’t swallow things.”

“She is dreadfully nervous, poor child,” Mrs. Hamilton said to her husband. “I am thankful we are so near our journey’s end, for I am afraid she would be ill if this suspense lasted much longer.”

But as the train drew nearer and nearer to the great city, Peggy became suddenly conscious of a longing for companionship and sympathy, and



she drew close to Winifred, and slipped her hand into that of her friend.

"Aren't you glad we're nearly there?" Winifred whispered, giving the little cold hand an encouraging squeeze.

"I—I don't know," faltered Peggy. "I think I'm glad, but a person can't help feeling a little bit queer when she knows she's going to see her sister for the first time since she was four."

"I know," said Winifred, comprehendingly. "I felt just that way when I heard mother was coming home from California. I wanted her—oh, I did want her so much—but I couldn't help being frightened, because you see, I didn't remember at all what she was like. Then, when she came, she was just Mrs. Smith, and—oh, it was all so beautiful!"

"And it will be beautiful, too, when I see my sister," said Peggy, with shining eyes. "I shall know her the first minute, from her photograph. I suppose she's been wanting me the same way your mother wanted you."

"Of course she has," said Winifred, with conviction.

Half an hour later they were steaming into Grand Central Station.



Mrs. Hamilton took Peggy's hand, and held it very tenderly, as they made their way out into the crowded station. The child was very pale, and her knees shook so that she could scarcely stand.

"Are you sure your sister and brother will know you, Peggy dear?" she asked, when they had waited fully five minutes, and still no one had approached the little girl with any signs of recognition.

Peggy nodded.

"I sent them my photograph," she said, tremulously. "Oh, Mrs. Hamilton, do you think perhaps something dreadful has happened? Aunt Mary said Edith or Harry would surely come to meet me."

"They may have made a mistake in the hour," Mrs. Hamilton reassured her, "or there may have been some delay. Don't tremble so, darling; there is nothing to be frightened about. We will wait a little longer, and then if nobody comes for you, Mr. Hamilton will take you out to Montclair. It is only a little way."

They did wait five, ten, fifteen minutes longer. Peggy watched the hands of the big station clock, and every moment her heart beat faster and faster. There seemed to be a never-ending stream



of people coming and going, but nobody spoke to her—nobody claimed her.

“Perhaps they didn’t receive your aunt’s letter in time,” Mrs. Hamilton said at last. “Letters sometimes go astray, you know. Now, Peggy dear, you mustn’t cry; that is very foolish. Mr. Hamilton is going to take you to Montclair at once, and you will soon find out what the trouble is.”

Peggy made a great effort to suppress the sobs that seemed choking her.

“I won’t be a baby,” she said, and something in the words, and in the look that accompanied them caused Mrs. Hamilton to suddenly stoop, and take the little girl in her arms.

“Good-bye, darling,” she said, tenderly. “We shall never forget our dear little travelling companion.”

“We’ve had a lovely time together, haven’t we?” said Winifred, kissing her friend affectionately. “I shall tell my friends all about you, and you must come and make me a visit very soon.”

“I’d like to,” said Peggy, smiling through her tears, “but I think perhaps Edith won’t let me. She’ll be so glad to see me, you know, and perhaps she won’t want me to go away again.”



“Well, you can come and spend the day, any way,” said Winifred, “and maybe your sister will come with you.”

“That would be lovely,” said Peggy, heartily. And then Mr. Hamilton hurried her away, and almost before she realized what was happening, they were whirling away downtown in a Fourth Avenue cable car.

It was very noisy and confusing, but Peggy scarcely noticed her surroundings. Mr. Hamilton did his best to entertain her, and pointed out streets and buildings, but I doubt if the little girl heard half of what he said to her. At Fourteenth Street they changed to another car, which was so crowded that they were obliged to stand, and Peggy had hard work to keep from falling against the passengers on either side of her. It was a relief to reach the ferry, although the crowd was greater than ever there and she clung to Mr. Hamilton’s hand, in momentary dread of being swept away from him, and lost in the hurrying, jostling throng.

The trip on the ferry boat was rather pleasanter, for they stood outside, and Mr. Hamilton showed her a big English steamer, which was just coming into her dock, but when they reached



the New Jersey side, the crowd and confusion were more bewildering than ever.

Mr. Hamilton, however, did not appear at all disturbed by the bustle, which seemed so dreadful to his little companion, but quickly led the way to a waiting train, beside which a man was shouting vociferously, "Montclair accommodation, on track six."

"I am afraid we may have some difficulty in finding seats," Mr. Hamilton said, as they entered a crowded car. "This is just the time when all the men are coming home from business."

It was true, and after walking through three cars, they were obliged to give up the hope of finding seats together. Peggy was obliged to sit beside a young man, who was apparently too much absorbed in his newspaper to notice anything else, while Mr. Hamilton shared a seat with a stout old lady, and a number of parcels, on the opposite side of the aisle.

As the train began to move, Peggy's heart gave a great nervous bound, and began to throb painfully fast again.

"Oh, Dorothea," she said, unconsciously speaking aloud; "we're almost there. What do



you suppose is the reason they didn't meet me? I'm so afraid Edith is ill, or something has happened to Harry. I don't want to be a baby, Dorothea dear, but I am very frightened."

"Hello, kiddie!" said a voice close at her side; "what's the matter?"

Peggy looked up with a start, to encounter a pair of mischievous blue eyes regarding her curiously. The eyes belonged to the young man who was sharing her seat, and who had laid down his newspaper, and was looking both amused and interested. He had not at all an unpleasant face. Indeed, he was a decidedly good-looking young fellow, but Peggy objected to being addressed as "Kiddie," especially by a stranger, so she shrank further into her corner, as she answered primly—

"Nothing is the matter, thank you."

"I thought you spoke to me," the young man said, looking puzzled.

Peggy flushed crimson, and her eyes drooped.

"No, I didn't," she stammered; "I was only talking to Dorothea."

"And who may Dorothea be, if one is permitted to ask?"

Peggy was silent. It was one thing to make a confidante of one's doll, but quite another to





“ Hello, kiddie, what’s the matter ? ” — *Page 84.*







explain to a strange young gentleman about it. Besides, she reflected indignantly, this very inquisitive person had no right to question her at all.

"Who is Dorothea?" the young man persisted, his blue eyes dancing with fun, and as he spoke, he glanced at the doll, which Peggy was half unconsciously trying to hide under her jacket.

Peggy cast an imploring glance in the direction of Mr. Hamilton, but that gentleman had bought an evening paper, and appeared to be as much absorbed in its contents as her troublesome companion had been.

"I'd rather not tell you," she said, and though her voice shook with nervousness, there was a flash of defiance in her eyes.

The young man laughed, and the mischievous expression deepened in his eyes.

"Oh, yes, you will," he said, good-naturedly. "You're a nice little girl, you know, and you haven't an idea how popular I am with little girls. Tell me who Dorothea is, and what you were saying to her, and I'll buy you a box of caramels when the man comes through the train."

"I don't care for caramels, thank you, and my grandma never let me take things from people I didn't know."



“What a very particular old lady your grandmother must have been. I don’t believe I should have liked her.”

This was too much. With a glance of speechless indignation, Peggy rose from her seat, and next moment Mr. Hamilton felt a little hand on his arm.

“Why, what’s the matter, Peggy?” he inquired, looking up in surprise at the flushed, indignant child, who stood confronting him, with burning cheeks and trembling lips.

“I—I don’t like to sit in that seat. There’s a very disagreeable gentleman there.”

Mr. Hamilton half rose, and cast an angry glance in the direction of Peggy’s new acquaintance, who was watching proceedings, with an expression of mingled annoyance and amusement.

“What has he been saying to you?” he inquired, sharply.

“He—he called me kiddie, and he tried to make me tell him about Dorothea.”

Mr. Hamilton smiled and resumed his seat.

“Oh, that is the trouble, is it?” he said, in a tone of considerable relief. “Well, suppose you come and sit on my knee. There doesn’t appear to be another vacant seat.”



"I don't see why grown-up people like to tease little girls," Peggy remarked indignantly, as, safely ensconced on Mr. Hamilton's knee, she cast a withering glance at her tormenter. "It was bad enough when Dick and Charlie did it, but I should think a grown-up young gentleman would know better."

"I wouldn't talk quite so loud about it if I were you," said Mr. Hamilton, mildly. "I am afraid he may hear."

Peggy relapsed into silence, and sat staring steadily out of the window; but in a few moments she had almost forgotten her troublesome neighbor, in thoughts of the coming meeting with her family.

At the next station the young man left the train, but on his way out he paused by Mr. Hamilton's seat, and coolly bowed to Peggy, his eyes dancing with fun.

"I'm sorry I made myself so disagreeable," he said. "As you say, a grown-up young gentleman ought to know better." And then he departed, leaving Peggy more than a little ashamed, but still decidedly indignant.

But shame and indignation were alike forgotten when the train stopped again, and the conductor shouted "Montclair." There was a gen-



eral move, as Montclair was the end of the branch line, and the passengers filed out on to the platform. Peggy's knees were shaking, and her feet and hands felt very cold, as she followed Mr. Hamilton across the station platform and into a cab. She heard the direction given; "to Mr. Henry Lee's, please;" and then they were rattling away through the streets of the pretty little town. It was a lovely evening in late May, and the lilacs and wisteria were all in bloom in the gardens they passed.

They drove on for some ten or fifteen minutes, and then the cab suddenly turned in at a gate, and stopped before a small, but very pretty house, the front door of which stood invitingly open. Mr. Hamilton stepped out; then turned to give his hand to his little companion; but already Peggy had caught sight of a very pretty young lady, in a white dress, who, at that moment, had come out through the open door on to the piazza, and with a scream of uncontrollable delight, she was out of the cab, and up the steps, with a bound.

"Edith, Edith, oh Edith dear, don't you know me?" she cried, flinging herself upon the astonished young lady. "I'm Peggy—your own

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little sister Peggy—and I've come to live with you."

The young lady, who had turned rather pale at the suddenness of it all, uttered a faint cry, and dropped helplessly into a chair.

"Peggy," she gasped, "little Peggy; where in the world——"

"I've come all the way from California," sobbed Peggy, her arms around her sister's neck. "Why didn't you meet me at the station in New York? Aunt Mary said you would; she wrote you a letter all about it."

"Letter!" repeated Miss Lee, blankly. "I never received any letter. I was never so surprised in my life. But, Peggy dear, I don't understand; I thought you were going to live with the Eliots."

Miss Lee had partially recovered from the first shock of astonishment, and was gently disentangling herself from Peggy's almost strangling embrace. She was trembling herself, and there were tears in her eyes, but whether they were tears of joy or amazement, Mr. Hamilton—who had remained quietly in the background—did not feel at all sure.

"I was going to live with the Eliots," Peggy



explained, gazing with radiant eyes into her sister's puzzled face; "but I wasn't very well after grandma died, and Dr. Scott said I ought to have a change, so Aunt Mary asked me if I would like to come East to you and Harry, and of course I said I would. Aren't you awfully glad to see me?"

"Of course I am glad, darling, very glad indeed," said Edith, kissing her, "but I am so astonished. I don't think I quite realize it all yet. You say Aunt Mary wrote?"

"Yes, of course she did, and she said you or Harry would meet me in New York, but you didn't, and I was so afraid something dreadful was the matter. Where's Harry? Can't I go and surprise him too?"

"He isn't coming home this evening. He is going to a dance at Glen Ridge, and will spend the night with a friend there. But, Peggy dear, you surely haven't come all the way from California by yourself?"

Edith's eyes had wandered past Peggy, and were now resting inquiringly upon Mr. Hamilton.

"I think I must introduce myself," the gentleman said, stepping forward, with a pleasant smile. "Our little friend is too excited to think



of any one but her sister just now. My name is Hamilton, and my wife and I have had the pleasure of bringing Peggy on from California. Mrs. Hamilton is an old friend of your aunt, Mrs. Eliot."

Edith, who had by this time quite recovered her usual composure, greeted the stranger very kindly, and after thanking him for his care of her little sister, asked him to stay and dine with them. This, however, Mr. Hamilton declined to do, saying that his wife would be expecting him, and he was anxious to take the next train back to New York. So after a little more conversation, he bade the sisters good-bye, and returned to his waiting cab.

"I think I can tell Winifred that I have left her little friend very happy," he said, with a kind glance at Peggy, who was squeezing and kissing her sister's hand, in a perfect ecstasy of rapture.

"Yes," said Peggy, smiling, and holding out her hand, in the pretty, old-fashioned way her grandmother had taught her. "Please tell her my sister is even prettier than the photograph I showed her, and thank you very much for bringing me all the way to Montclair, New Jersey."



Mr. Hamilton smiled again; gave the little hand a hearty shake and two minutes later he was driving back to the station.

"Poor little thing," he said to himself, as the cab turned out of the Lee's gate, and he caught a last glimpse of the two sisters standing side by side on the piazza. "It's all very blissful just now, but I hope there isn't a disappointment in store for that poor child. The sister has a sweet face, but it will take a deal of love to give her all she expects."

"And now come upstairs, and let us see if we can't wash some of the dust off that little face of yours," said Edith, as the cab and its occupant disappeared from view. "I don't feel as if I were quite awake even yet. Are you sure you are real, Peggy, and not just a part of a dream?"

Peggy laughed joyously.

"I knew you'd be glad," she said. "See, I've brought Dorothea. She's the doll you sent me for Christmas, you know."

"Oh, is she, really? Well, I am very glad to renew my acquaintance with Miss Dorothea." And Edith laughed, the prettiest, most fascinating laugh imaginable, and stooped to give Peggy another kiss.



Then she led the way upstairs to a pretty room on the second floor, which she told Peggy was the guest chamber.

"But I never dreamed that you were going to be our next guest," she added. "It really is delightful to have you, Peggy; how long do you suppose Aunt Mary will let you stay with us?"

"Why, I've come to live with you," cried Peggy, triumphantly. "Aunt Mary doesn't think I get on very well with children. I did get on all right with Winifred Hamilton, though, and she's my best friend. Anyhow, Aunt Mary thinks I don't, so she's sent me to live with you and Harry. She did say it was for a visit, but I knew you wouldn't ever let me go again, and I'm sure she won't mind. Grandma told her I was to live with the people who would make me the happiest, and of course I would be happier with you than anybody else in the world."

Edith had suddenly disappeared in the closet, ostensibly to put away her sister's hat and jacket, and so Peggy could not see the expression of her face on hearing this announcement; but when she came out again a moment later, she was smiling, though her cheeks were rather flushed, and there was a slightly puzzled look in her eyes.



## CHAPTER VII

### PEGGY UNPACKS AND MAKES ACQUAINTANCES

WHAT a blissfully happy evening that was! Peggy never forgot it. She and Edith had dinner together in the prettiest of little dining-rooms, waited upon by a silent young person in a white cap and apron, whom Edith addressed as Christine, and after dinner they sat on the sofa together, in the pleasant room, which had once been Uncle Henry's library, but was now the family sitting-room, and talked of many things.

"I've got a great deal to tell you about," Peggy remarked, as they settled themselves for a comfortable chat. "Some of the things are rather disagreeable, so I think I'd better tell them first."

"All right," said Edith, laughing; "what comes first?"

"Well," said Peggy, slowly, "I'm not at all good. I've got a dreadful temper. I didn't know I had until after grandma died, but it's



really very bad indeed. I scratched Charlie's face, and made his nose bleed, because he tried to steal the oriole's eggs, and I was very angry with Maud, because she said things about Fraulein."

Edith laughed and kissed her.

"You darling," she said.

"I'm glad you don't mind," said Peggy, with a sigh of relief. "I was afraid you might. I think that's the worst thing I have to tell; most of the others are nice."

And so Peggy chatted on; telling of her home with grandma and Fraulein; of Aunt Mary and her cousins, and of the long journey with the Hamiltons. And Edith listened and questioned and answered, showing an interest in everything that was truly delightful. So the evening slipped away, and Edith—who was quite unaccustomed to children—never thought of suggesting bed, until the clock struck half-past nine, and Peggy's head suddenly began to nod.

"I'm afraid you're tired," said Edith, kindly; "would you like to go to bed?"

"It's so lovely sitting here with you that I hate to," said Peggy, regretfully, "but I guess I am just a little bit tired. You see, I always had to go to bed at eight o'clock at home."



Peggy was indeed very tired. Now that the first excitement was over, she was beginning to feel the reaction, and an older person would have noticed the heavy lines under her eyes, and the weary drag of the little feet as the child climbed the stairs; but Edith was only twenty, and rather thoughtless about such things. She was very kind, however, and sat on the edge of Peggy's bed, and chatted to her all the time she was undressing. But when Peggy's hair had been brushed and braided for the night, and the little girl was ready for bed, it did not occur to the older sister to linger for the petting and tucking up that children love.

"Now I think you have everything you want," she said, cheerfully, "so suppose I put out the light and leave you to go to sleep."

Peggy looked a little wistful, but she said nothing, only lifted her face for a kiss.

"Good-night, dear," said Edith, when she had kissed the little upturned face. "Sleep well, and get a good rest. You must be tired after your long journey. Why, Peggy dear, what is it?" For with a sudden impulse, Peggy had flung her arms round her sister's neck.

"Oh, I love you, I love you!" cried the child,



passionately. "You're even dearer and sweeter, and beautifuler than I thought you'd be, and I'm so happy I don't know what to do."

"Peggy, why, little Peggy," Edith murmured, holding her close; "I had no idea you cared so much."

She sat down on the bed, and took her little sister in her lap. Perhaps it was just as well that Peggy did not know all the thoughts in Edith's mind at that moment, for some of them were very perplexed and self-reproachful. They were both silent for a few minutes, and then Edith rose, with a sigh.

"I really must go now, darling," she said, "for it's getting dreadfully late. Are you sure you have everything you want?"

Peggy hesitated, and a wistful expression came into her face.

"The bed is very big for only just one person, isn't it?" she said timidly. "I suppose you don't like sleeping with people."

Edith laughed and shook her head.

"I don't like it at all," she said, decidedly. "Do you mean you're afraid to sleep alone?"

"Oh, no," said Peggy, blushing; "I'm not so silly as that. I only thought perhaps—but it



doesn't matter. Grandma never liked to have people sleep with her either, but Fraulein didn't mind."

"I hope I'm not going to be a baby, Dorothea," Peggy whispered, hugging Dorothea tight, when Edith, after kissing her again, had put out the light and gone away. "I know it's only babies who are afraid of the dark, and Dick and Charlie would laugh so if they knew; but, oh, Dorothea dear, wouldn't it have been lovely if Edith hadn't minded sleeping with people?"

But Peggy was very tired, and even her old fear of the dark was powerless to keep her awake that night. She lay for a few minutes, thinking of the big bed and strange, unfamiliar room, and then a pleasant languor began to steal over her; her eyes closed, and she was fast asleep.

Peggy was already half dressed next morning, and was struggling with a refractory button, when Edith, still in her bath wrapper, came into the room.

"Why didn't you call Christine?" the older sister inquired, when she had returned Peggy's rapturous greeting. "I told you she would help you dress."

"I thought perhaps I could manage all right



by myself," Peggy explained. "I can do 'most everything except the buttons and my hair. I didn't quite like to bother Christine. Is she a pleasant person?"

Edith laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"As pleasant as most of them I suppose," she said, indifferently. "I never thought very much about her. She does her work fairly well."

"I thought she looked rather cross last night," said Peggy, doubtfully.

"Oh, I daresay she was. It was her night out, and I expected to dine with friends, as Harry was away, but of course when you came I had to telephone that I couldn't come. Christine doesn't enjoy having her plans interfered with."

"I'm sorry," said Peggy, blushing. "I suppose if you had gotten Aunt Mary's letter you could have explained to her, and then perhaps she could have arranged to go out some other night."


"Oh, it doesn't matter. Christine is sure to be put out about something or other. Maids are a dreadful nuisance, especially when one can only afford to keep two, but I have too many other things to do to worry much over them."



Then Edith—who had no scruples about disturbing Christine—summoned the maid to assist Peggy in her toilet. Christine appeared, looking if possible, more sullen than on the previous evening, and having performed her task in almost unbroken silence, went downstairs again, leaving the little girl feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

“I’ll practise doing my own hair,” she decided, “and then I won’t have to bother any one. It’s very uncomfortable to be a bother. It won’t matter so much about the buttons if I leave out a few where they won’t show.”

“I’m so very sorry, Peggy dear,” said Edith, at breakfast, “but I’ve got several engagements for to-day. I have to run in to town for a couple of hours this morning, to keep an appointment at the dressmaker’s, and this evening Harry and I are going out to a dinner party. I hate to leave you on your first day, but I really don’t see how it can be helped. That tiresome dressmaker has kept me waiting an age as it is, and if I don’t keep my appointments she’ll be sure to make an excuse for putting me off still longer. Do you think you can manage to amuse yourself this morning? We can be together all the afternoon.”





"Oh, yes," said Peggy, "only—only, don't you think I could go with you to the dressmaker's?"

Edith looked doubtful.

"You could I suppose," she said, "but it seems foolish to take you all the way into New York and out again before luncheon. It's going to be a hot day, and I shall be in such a rush. I really don't believe you would enjoy it."

"All right," said Peggy, cheerfully, but she looked a little disappointed, nevertheless.

"You'll find some nice books on the second shelf of the library bookcase," said Edith, as she was bidding her little sister good-bye, half an hour later. "They belonged to Harry and me when we were children. I hope you are fond of reading. I loved it when I was your age."

"I like it very much," said Peggy, "but I haven't read many books myself. Grandma and Fraulein always read to me. Sometimes I don't understand all the long words."

"Oh, you'll get used to the long words pretty soon," said Edith, laughing. "Now good-bye, Pussy-cat; I must hurry or I shall miss the nine-fifteen. I shall be back to luncheon, and if you want anything while I'm away, be sure to ask Christine for it."



Peggy stood on the piazza, watching her sister hurrying down the street, until the tall, slim figure had disappeared from view, and then she turned, with a sigh, and went into the house.

"I don't believe I'll read this morning," she said to herself; "I guess I'm too excited to think about stories. I'll go and get Dorothea, and we'll sit on the piazza, and watch the people going by."

Peggy's trunk had arrived late the previous evening, but as yet nobody had had time to unpack it, and it was still standing in the middle of the room, somewhat to the little girl's surprise, for Peggy was accustomed to grandma's and Fraulein's orderly habits. Indeed, the condition of the whole house was something of a surprise to her. It was all very pretty and attractive, but things were lying about in a way that she had never seen at home, and there was certainly more dust on the furniture than she was accustomed to.

"I suppose it's because Edith is so very busy, and Christine doesn't care," she decided, as she went slowly upstairs in quest of Dorothea, and then suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to her. Why should she not make herself useful by unpacking her own trunk? Perhaps Christine



would like her better when she found that she didn't want to be a bother. So, having reached her room, she set to work, and with a good deal of difficulty, succeeded in lifting out one of the heavy trays, and spreading its contents on the bed. It was quite easy to arrange her underclothes in the bureau drawers but when it came to hanging up the dresses, she discovered that most of the hooks in the closet were too high to reach except by standing on a chair, and by the time she had dragged a chair into just the right spot, and hung up two or three garments, she was so hot and tired that she decided to leave the rest of her unpacking until later in the day.

"I'm afraid I have made the room look very untidy," she said, with a regretful glance at the array of articles, which were strewn over every piece of furniture. "I wonder what Fraulein would say, but I don't believe Edith will mind."

On her way downstairs, she peeped into her brother's room, which smelled of cigars, and contained some interesting photographs of pretty girls, and young men in yachting and football costumes. She looked in vain for the photograph of herself, which she had sent Harry some time ago, but not finding it, decided that he had



probably put it away in a drawer, where it wouldn't get dusty.

"I wish Harry would come home," she said to Dorothea; "I'm very anxious to see him. I think he must be a very lovely young gentleman, but of course he can't be as dear as Edith. I do hope he'll be nice. I used to think all young gentlemen were nice, till I saw that horrid one in the train yesterday. I'm so glad he doesn't live here, because if he did Edith might know him, and I should hate to have to see him again after he heard what I said to Mr. Hamilton." And Peggy grew suddenly hot at the recollection of the young man's parting glance and the words that had accompanied it.

The Lees' house was on one of the principal streets of the town, and Peggy quite enjoyed sitting on the piazza, and watching the passers-by. Some of them glanced at her in evident surprise, and she decided that they must be friends of Edith's, and were wondering who Miss Lee's little visitor could be.

"Perhaps they call her 'the beautiful Miss Lee,'" she said to herself. "The beautiful Miss Lee's little sister; that sounds very pretty."

Just then her attention was attracted by something, which for the moment drove even the



recollection of her adored sister from her thoughts. A little girl of about her own age was toiling slowly along the street, carrying a heavy clothes basket. The basket seemed to be almost as big as the child herself, and it was certainly very heavy, for, as she reached the Lees' gate, the little girl set it down on the sidewalk, and stood leaning against the fence, panting for breath. Peggy's sympathies were instantly aroused. Leaving Dorothea in the rocker they had been sharing, she rose, walked down the path to the gate, and remarked in a tone of righteous indignation——

"That basket is much too heavy for you to carry all by yourself. It'll hurt your back."

The stranger turned a flushed, heated little face upon her in evident surprise.

"It is awful heavy," she admitted.

"Then why do you carry it all alone? Can't you get any one to help you?"

"Mother told my brother to help me, but he wouldn't. He's a real mean boy, and he ran off and hid, so I couldn't find him."

Peggy's eyes flashed indignantly.

"Boys are very mean sometimes," she agreed heartily. "Why didn't you tell your mother about it?"



"I couldn't. She's out washing, and she said them clothes must go over to Mrs. Rutherford's this morning, sure, because the lady that's visiting there, and that they belong to, is going away to-day."

"Is it far to Mrs. Rutherford's?" Peggy inquired, anxiously.

"It's up on Mountain Avenue quite a piece."

"I don't know where that is, because I only came yesterday, but if it's far you ought not to carry that heavy basket. My grandma knew a little girl, who hurt her back dreadfully lifting heavy weights in gymnasium. She had to lie in bed for a whole year."

A frightened expression came into the little girl's blue eyes, and she looked as if she were going to cry.

"That would be awful," she said. "There wouldn't be nobody to look after Cora and Minna when mother was out washing, for Fritz is just no good at all. I don't know what I can do, though. Mother'll be awful mad if I don't get them clothes to Rutherford's this morning, and I've come so far now it would be about as easy to go on as to go home. It's a shame of Fritz, for he's a big boy, 'most thirteen,



and it wouldn't be nothing for the two of us to carry."

Then a sudden inspiration made Peggy's dark little face flush with excitement.

"I'll go with you and help you carry it," she exclaimed. "Just wait a minute till I get my hat." And without waiting to note the effect of her words upon her new acquaintance, she darted away up the path and into the house.

Christine was nowhere to be seen, and she reached her own room unobserved; snatched her straw hat from the closet shelf, and was back at the gate almost before the other child had recovered from her surprise at the startling announcement.

"Now I'm ready," she said, triumphantly. "We'll each take a handle, and I don't believe it will be so very heavy."

But the other little girl still hesitated, glancing doubtfully from Peggy's jaunty straw hat to her pretty white dress.

"Did your folks say you could?" she inquired.

"There isn't anybody at home except Christine and the cook, and I don't believe I have to ask them. My sister has gone to New York,



but I'm quite sure she wouldn't mind. She's the loveliest young lady in the world."

"All right, then, if you're sure they won't make a row. I say, it's awful good of you, though."

"Oh, no, it isn't," said Peggy, flushing with pleasure. "I love to help people, only you see, I don't get the chance very often. I never lived in a big town like this before. I suppose I shall have more chances now; there are so many people here."

The basket really was pretty heavy, even when the weight was divided between the two children. How the poor little girl had carried it alone Peggy could not understand. Her own back was aching before they had walked a block, and big beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead.

"It's—it's a pretty warm day, isn't it?" she panted. "Suppose we sit down and rest just for a few minutes."

Her companion assented, and the basket was once more set down on the sidewalk, while the children seated themselves on the curb to rest.

"Rich folks do wear an awful lot of clothes, don't they?" the owner of the basket remarked speculatively, as she paused to wipe her heated



brow with the sleeve of her dress. "There's enough things in that basket to keep us all clean for a year, I guess."

"Do you live far from here?" Peggy inquired, not feeling qualified to express an opinion as to the wardrobes of "rich folks."

"Down near the depot. It's a good long walk, especially with a big, heavy basket to carry. I don't like to be gone long neither; I'm always so scared for fear something'll happen to Minna. Cora's only six, and she can't look after her good."

"Are Cora and Minna your sisters, and is your mother out all the time?"

"She's out most days except when she gets washing to do at home. She's had to work awful hard since father died. There's four of us; Fritz is the oldest; then I come—I'm just ten—; Cora's six, and Minna's three. Minna's just the cutest young one you ever did see."

"And what is your name?" Peggy inquired. She was beginning to find this new acquaintance rather interesting.

"Tilly Winkler. We're all Winklers. Fritz Winkler; Tilly Winkler; Cora Winkler and Minna Winkler. Father's name was Karl Winkler, and mother's is Louise Winkler."



"Karl and Fritz are the names of Fraulein's two little nephews in Germany," said Peggy, much struck by the coincidence. "Are you German people?"

"Yes, father and mother were both born in Germany, but they came over here when Fritz was a baby, and we can all talk English better than we can German. Mother talks awful funny English; Fritz laughs at her."

"He must be very rude," said Peggy, with feeling. "Fraulein used to make rather funny mistakes in English sometimes, but I never laughed at her. I can talk some German, too, but not very much."

Tilly rose.

"I guess we'd better be getting along," she said. "I never do feel easy about Minna when I ain't there to see to her."

Peggy could not repress a sigh, as she once more lifted the heavy basket from the ground, but not for words would she have backed out of her agreement, so the two little girls toiled wearily on for another five minutes, until they reached a large, pleasant-looking house, surrounded by trees. As they walked up the board path from the front gate, Peggy noticed the sign "Dr. Rutherford" over the door. There were



two ladies on the piazza, and as the children approached, one of them—an elderly lady, with a very sweet face—rose and came hurriedly forward.

“Why, my dear little girls,” she exclaimed, and there was real concern in her tone; “you don’t mean to tell me that you two children have carried that heavy basket all the way from Frog Hollow?”

“Yes’m,” said Tilly, setting down her burden on the front steps, not without some pardonable pride. “Mother said you must have them things this morning, and my brother wouldn’t help me. I was carrying it all by myself, but she”—pointing to Peggy—“said she’d come along, so she did, and we carried it together.”

“Well, you must both sit down and rest,” said Mrs. Rutherford, kindly. “I will call the maid to take in the basket.”

Tilly promptly seated herself on the lowest step, and Peggy followed her example more slowly. She was beginning to feel just a little uncomfortable. Both ladies were regarding her curiously, and she had a vague misgiving that it was not quite customary for little girls, whose sisters were fashionable young ladies, to carry clothes-baskets through the streets. Mrs. Ruth-



erford and her friend exchanged a few words in a low tone, and then the former went into the house, when she speedily returned, bearing a plate on which were two thick slices of delicious frosted cake. She was followed by a maid in a white cap and apron, who promptly removed the clothes-basket from the piazza.

"I am sure you would each like a piece of cake after your long, hot walk," Mrs. Rutherford said, pleasantly, offering the plate to the children.

Tilly accepted the cake with an eager "thank you, ma'am," and again Peggy followed her example, although the shy, uncomfortable feeling was rather increasing than decreasing. The cake was delicious, however; it was quite impossible to help enjoying it; and by the time it was finished both children were feeling quite rested. Meanwhile Mrs. Rutherford's friend had disappeared, but just as the little girls rose to go, she came out on the piazza again, with something in her hand.

"Here is a reward for your trouble," she said, smiling, and approaching Peggy, she held out a bright silver fifty cent piece. "Tell your mother I am very much obliged to her for sending my



things so quickly. I find that I am obliged to leave a day earlier than I expected."

Peggy drew back, suddenly feeling very hot indeed.

"Give it to her, please," she faltered; "it's her mother who does the washing."

"Well, I think you are both entitled to a share, considering that you carried the basket between you," said the lady, kindly. "Suppose you change it for two quarters; then you can each have one."

"Thank you very much, but I don't think my sister would like——" began Peggy; then paused, with crimson cheeks and hanging head.

The ladies both looked at her more closely, and Mrs. Rutherford said in a tone of surprise——

"I don't think I have ever seen you before. What is your name, little girl?"

"Peggy," said the child, in a low voice. "I only came yesterday," she added hurriedly.

"Oh, that accounts for it. I thought I knew most of the children in the neighborhood. Where do you live?"

There was no answer, for Peggy had already turned, and was walking very fast—almost run-



ning, in fact—down the path to the gate. She was speedily followed by Tilly.

“I say, it was just grand of you to help me with that basket,” said Tilly, gratefully, as the two children hurried along in a homeward direction. “Won’t you let me give you half of that fifty cents? She gave it all to me when you wouldn’t take it.”

“No—oh, no, indeed!” said Peggy, and she felt herself growing hot again. “I wouldn’t take it for the world.”

“Well, you’re real good,” Tilly declared, pocketing the precious coin, with an air of considerable relief. “I guess you belong to rich folks, anyway, don’t you?”

“Yes, I guess I do,” said Peggy, softly, and she suddenly found herself wondering what grandma or Fraulein would have said to the morning’s proceedings.

“Well, it was kind, even if it wasn’t what ladies generally do,” she reflected, “and grandma said a true lady was always kind;” having comforted herself with which reflection, Peggy felt decidedly more comfortable.

At the Lees’ gate the friends parted.

“Good-bye,” said Tilly; “I’ve got to run home to look after the kids.”



“Good-bye,” returned Peggy, holding out her hand politely. “I’m very happy to have met you,” she added in her prim, old-fashioned little way. “You must come and see me some time, and bring Cora and Minna.”

Tilly looked very much pleased.

“All right; I will,” she said. “You don’t suppose your folks would mind, do you?”

“I’m sure they wouldn’t,” said Peggy, with decision. “You are a very nice little girl, and Edith said this morning she wished she knew some nice little girls for me to play with.”

And then the friends separated, and Peggy went back to the piazza, to tell Dorothea all about her little adventure.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A DISAPPOINTMENT AND A FRIGHT

EDITH reached home in time for luncheon, but she did not come alone. She brought with her another young lady, whose name was Miss Harriet Foster. Miss Foster was bright and pretty, and she greeted Peggy very kindly, but when she had asked a few questions about California, and about her journey, she seemed to find nothing else to say to the little girl, and devoted all her attention to Edith. The two were evidently intimate friends, and they had a great deal to say to each other during luncheon, so that Peggy was rather left out in the cold; but when they did speak to her they were always kind. Peggy, who had been brought up by grandma's old-fashioned rules, would not have dreamed of interrupting the conversation of her elders, so she ate her luncheon almost in silence, and found no opportunity to tell Edith of her morning's adventure.



After luncheon Edith and her friend went upstairs together. They did not ask Peggy to accompany them, and the little girl was just beginning to wonder rather disconsolately, what she should do to amuse herself, when she heard her sister's voice calling her from the top of the stairs.

"Peggy, dear, what in the world have you been doing to your room? It looks as if a cyclone had struck it."

Edith's voice sounded as if she were laughing, but Peggy felt a little conscience-smitten, notwithstanding, and she hastened to explain.

"I'm very sorry," she said, apologetically, running upstairs as she spoke. "I know it looks dreadfully. I thought I could unpack by myself, but the hooks were so high——"

"You dear little busy-body!" laughed Edith. "Of course you couldn't do it by yourself. Why didn't you ask Christine to help you?"

"I—I didn't like to," stammered Peggy.

"Nonsense! Run down and tell her to come and put your things away properly, just as soon as she has finished with the dishes. Yes, Harriet, I'm coming right away." And Edith disappeared, leaving her little sister to carry out her instructions.



"I hate to ask her, she looks so cross," Peggy said to herself, as she went slowly downstairs again, "but I suppose I've got to."

She found Christine in the pantry, busy with the luncheon dishes, and made her request in a very timid little voice indeed. The maid said nothing, but looked so very cross that Peggy was glad to make her escape to the piazza, where she spent the next half-hour playing with Dorothea. Then Edith and Miss Foster came down again, and the latter soon took her departure.

"You are a nice little girl," she said kindly, pausing for a moment on the piazza, to say good-bye to Peggy. "I love to see little girls playing with dolls. She seems a nice, quiet child," she added in a lower tone to Edith, as the two friends walked down the path to the gate. "I don't believe she will really be much trouble."

"She is a darling," returned Edith, heartily. "I love having her here, but it was such a surprise, and goodness knows what Harry will say."

Peggy heard both remarks, for neither Edith nor her companion had spoken quite as low as she intended, and a troubled expression crept into her happy little face. Was it possible that



Harry—her own brother Harry— would object to having her live with him? But when Edith came back, after bidding her friend good-bye at the gate, she was so sweet and fascinating that Peggy soon forgot her momentary anxiety, and the two sisters spent a very happy afternoon together.

Edith had some sewing to do, and she took Peggy upstairs with her, and let the little girl chatter away to her heart's content, even leading her on by kind, interested questions.

"I'm so sorry about that tiresome dinner party for this evening," she said, regretfully, as she rose and folded up her work at five o'clock. "I hate to leave you so soon again. I would have declined, only people hate so to receive regrets at the last moment, and Harry might have been vexed."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Peggy, with forced cheerfulness, though her heart sank at the thought of the long, solitary evening. "May I help you dress? I love to see people's pretty things."

"To be sure you may," said Edith, good-naturedly; "and I daresay you will be more of a help than that stupid Christine, who never can



find the hooks on my gowns. I have ordered a nice little supper for you, and Christine will stay with you till you go to bed."

Peggy thought she could have dispensed with Christine's society, but decided that she might be better than nobody at all, so she changed the subject by inquiring at what hour Harry usually came home.

"He doesn't usually get here before half-past six," said Edith, "but he said he might come earlier this evening, on account of dressing for the dinner."

"Then I think I'll go down to the piazza and watch for him. I'd like to surprise him the same as I did you."

"Very well; run along." And Edith sat down at her desk to write a note, while Peggy, with a beating heart, descended to the piazza, to await the arrival of the brother, in whose hands she felt that her future fate might rest.

"Of course he won't care about me the way Edith does," she confided to Dorothea, "because he's a gentleman, and gentlemen never care much about children, except when they're their own, but I do hope he will like me just a little. It would be dreadful if he didn't like me at all, and wouldn't let Edith keep me. She said 'Good-



ness knows what Harry will say.' Oh, Dorothea dear, it is frightening; almost as frightening as it was when I didn't know what Edith would be like."

Peggy's reflections were cut short by the sound of an approaching footstep, accompanied by a cheerful whistle, and she looked up with a start, to see a tall young man coming leisurely up the path from the gate. Next moment she had sprung to her feet, almost dropping Dorothea in her astonishment, for the young man was none other than the inquisitive stranger of the previous afternoon. The recognition was apparently mutual, for at the same moment the gentleman stopped short in the middle of the path, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and asked in a playful way:

"Hello! what do I see? Can it be my young friend, who thinks grown-up gentlemen ought to know better than to tease little girls?"

He was smiling, and his eyes twinkled, as though at some amusing recollection, but Peggy was crimson with shame and indignation. She drew herself up with the little dignified air, that always amused older people, and turned to go into the house; but the gentleman called her back.



“Stop a minute,” he said, laughing. “Where are you going?”

“I’m going in,” said Peggy, stiffly. “Have you come to see Miss Lee? She’s upstairs, but I’ll call her.”

“So you know Miss Lee,” the stranger said, coolly mounting the piazza steps, and seating himself in the most comfortable chair he could find. “No, I’m not particularly anxious to see her just now, so suppose you sit down again, and have a little chat with me. I don’t think I ever saw you before yesterday. Do you live in Montclair?”

“Yes,” said Peggy, shortly. She longed to run away, but feared it might not be polite to do so, as it was evident that this very disagreeable young man must be a friend of the family, or he would not make himself so much at home.

“And who brought you here? You didn’t come by yourself to see my sister, did you?” was the young man’s surprising question.

“Your sister!” gasped Peggy, a sudden dreadful suspicion almost taking away her breath. “Are you—is Edith your sister?”

“She most certainly is,” said the young man, smiling, “and now, since you are such a good friend of hers that you call her by her first name,



don't you want to be friends with me too? I'm not as bad as I look; really I'm not."

His eyes still twinkled mischievously, but he held out his hand, and with another little gasp of horrified amazement, Peggy slipped hers into it.

"That's better. Now suppose you tell me your name."

"I'm Peggy," said the little girl, in a very low voice.

"Peggy; Peggy what?"

"Peggy Lee; I'm your—I'm Edith's sister."

"What!" ejaculated the young man, and now it was his turn to look astonished. "You don't mean to say—you're not little Peggy!"

"Yes, I am," said Peggy, her eyes drooping beneath her brother's incredulous gaze. "I only came yesterday. Aunt Mary wrote about it, but the letter didn't get here in time. I—I hope you won't mind very much."

"Mind? What should I mind for? But you certainly have given me a surprise. Come and tell a fellow all about it. Did you drop from the clouds, or fly all the way from California on a broom-stick? But first of all haven't you got a kiss for your big brother?" He lifted her on his knee as he spoke, and kissed her heartily.



Peggy's fears were beginning to subside; still she was bitterly disappointed.

"I hope you'll excuse me for talking so loud about you in the train," she said, apologetically. "Mr. Hamilton said it was rude."

Harry laughed and pinched her cheek.

"You're a funny little kid," he remarked in the same teasing tone that had so annoyed Peggy at their first meeting. "So you think grown-up gentlemen ought to know better. Well, you'll have to teach me, Peggy; I am sadly in need of teaching. But first tell me how you came and who brought you here."

"Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton brought me from California," Peggy explained, "and Mr. Hamilton came out here with me. We thought you or Edith would meet me at the station, but Aunt Mary's letter never came till this morning. It went to a wrong address, Edith says. Aunt Mary sent me here, because the doctor said I needed a change, and I'm going to live with you always."

Harry's face grew suddenly very blank indeed, and his feelings found vent in a long, low whistle; but just at that moment Edith appeared, and he turned to his sister for further explanations.



As soon as she could make her escape Peggy slipped down from her brother's knee, and went into the house.

"It's a very disappointing thing," she said to herself, winking hard to keep back the tears. "I hoped I should never have to see that horrid, teasing young gentleman again, and now I've got to love him, because he's Harry. I always thought Harry would be so nice."

She went up to her room, and sat down disconsolately in the big rocker by the window. Christine had put things in order, and the room looked very pretty and comfortable, but the little girl's heart was not as light as it had been half an hour earlier. She was not left long in solitude, however, for in a few minutes Edith and Harry both came upstairs to dress, and Edith called her into her room.

It was very interesting to watch her sister dress for the dinner party, and in her delight at being allowed to help in the fastening of hooks and buttoning of boots, Peggy almost forgot her disappointment.

"Wasn't it odd that you should have met Harry on the train yesterday," Edith said, as she stood before the dressing table, putting the finishing touches to her toilet. "Of course he



hadn't the least idea who you were, and as he got off the train at Glen Ridge, he didn't even know you were coming here."

"I sent him my photograph," said Peggy, innocently.

"Oh, yes, dear, I know you did, and it was a very good one, too, but I don't suppose Harry looked at you very closely, and even if he had he would hardly have recognized you. You see, your coming was such a surprise."

When Edith was dressed they went down to the piazza, where they were speedily joined by Harry, who certainly did look rather handsome in his evening clothes. Peggy was conscious of a little thrill of pride when she saw him. "If only he would leave off teasing," she thought, she might really be quite fond of him.

"Well, kiddie," he began pleasantly; "have you been giving Edith an account of our first meeting? By the way, now that the relationship between us is established, perhaps you will consent to tell me—in strictest confidence, you know—who Dorothea is."

"She's my doll," said Peggy, with an effort to be polite under difficulties.

Harry laughed.

"I suspected as much," he said. "Where is



the young lady now? May I not have the honor of an introduction?"

Peggy was saved the necessity of a reply, for at that moment Edith rose.

"Come, Harry," she said, gathering up her evening wrap; "it's time to start. Good-night, Peggy dear; you will be fast asleep by the time we get home. I have told Christine to take good care of you."

She kissed her little sister affectionately, and then Harry—who really did not appear to be at all an unkind young man, even if a tease—patted her head, remarking that he supposed she would be all right so long as she had the faithful Dorothea for company. But in spite of his jesting words, he did not look quite satisfied.

"Poor little thing," he said, as he and his sister walked down the path to the gate. "It seems rather rough on her to be left alone for the whole evening, with no one but that sour-faced Christine to look after her."

"I know it is," said Edith, regretfully, "but I didn't see what else I could do. I couldn't send word to the Parkers at the last moment."

"No, I don't suppose you could, especially as there was a possibility of Maurice Rutherford's being there."



Harry's eyes twinkled, but his sister flushed with annoyance.

"Don't be absurd," she said, sharply. "I really am very sorry about Peggy, for she is a dear little thing, and I do want to make her visit just as pleasant as possible."

"Her visit? She seems to be under the impression that she has come to make her home with us."

"I know she is, the darling, and I wouldn't undeceive her for the world; at least not yet. I received Aunt Mary's letter to-day, and she explains things very nicely. She says of course she wouldn't dream of burdening us with the care of a child, for any length of time, but Peggy was crazy to come, and the doctor advised change of air, so she thought it best to send her for a month or two. She knows some people who are going back to California about the first of July, and she is sure they will be willing to take charge of her on the journey. I am afraid she is a very nervous, excitable child. Aunt Mary says she was really quite ill after grandma died, and she doesn't seem to have gotten on very well with the Eliot children."

Peggy did not have a very cheerful supper. Everything was delicious, and the table was set



as daintily as if the whole family had been at home—Edith had attended to that before she went out—but Christine, standing behind her chair, her face the picture of sour discontent, was scarcely a pleasant companion. Poor Peggy hurried so much, for fear of keeping the maid too long, that she left the table without having eaten half as much as she would have liked. As she pushed back her chair, a sudden thought occurred to her, and she inquired timidly——

“Would you like to have me help you with the dishes, Christine. I wouldn’t mind doing it, and you were very kind about unpacking my things.”

Christine’s grim face relaxed a little, but she shook her head obstinately.

“I don’t need any help,” she said. “What time do you go to bed?”

Peggy glanced at the clock.

“I used to go at eight when I was at home,” she said, “and it isn’t half-past seven yet; but there isn’t anything particular to do, so I suppose I may as well go now.”

“Very well,” said Christine, and for the first time that evening she looked actually cheerful. “Call me when you are ready, and I will come and braid your hair.”



So Peggy went upstairs, and began to undress. She was not sleepy, but as she had said, there was nothing to do, and bed seemed about as comfortable a place as any other in which to spend the long evening. She thought of last evening, and how happy she had been with her sister, and could not help hoping that Edith did not go to dinner parties very often. Still, it was pleasant to think what a good time she must be having. Of course she was the prettiest lady at the party, and of course all the young gentlemen were longing to sit next to her. Her mind was so full of this subject, that she could not resist mentioning it to Christine, when the maid came up to braid her hair.

"Don't you think my sister is the prettiest young lady you have ever seen, Christine?" she inquired, with the faint hope of drawing the silent Christine into conversation.

"I have seen a good many pretty young ladies," was the maid's uncompromising reply, and Peggy relapsed into silence.

"Now, have you all you want, and may I put out the light?" inquired Christine, when Peggy's hair had been done up in two tight pigtails, and she had slipped into her little white nightgown.



"Oh, yes, thank you, I'm all right. I suppose you are going downstairs?" Peggy spoke a little anxiously. She did not want to be silly or babyish, but she could not help thinking that it would be very pleasant to have Christine within call.

"Yes, I am going down to the kitchen," said the maid, shortly.

Peggy said no more, and five minutes later she was lying alone in the darkness. She had said her prayers, and that made her feel more comfortable, for she knew God was watching over her; but her heart was beating uncomfortably fast, and she held Dorothea very tight.

"At home we could always hear people talking downstairs, couldn't we, Dorothea?" she said, speaking out loud, for there was nobody to hear. "It was never still like this. I don't think I like very still places, especially at night. I guess I'll shut my eyes, and try to go right to sleep, and then when I wake up it will be morning."

She did shut her eyes, but the harder she tried to go to sleep, the more wide awake she seemed to grow. It was very still. The only sounds to be heard were the ticking of the big clock on the stairs, and the occasional footstep



of a passer by in the quiet street. She strained her ears, in the vain hope of hearing the servants' voices, and once she crept out of bed, and went to the head of the stairs to listen, but all was silent.

"I wish the kitchen wasn't quite so far away," she said, getting into bed again. And in spite of her intention to be brave, her teeth chattered a little. "Oh, Dorothea dear, if you were only a person instead of a doll, what a great comfort you would be!"

It had been a very warm evening, but as Peggy lay tossing from side to side, trying to assure herself that she wasn't the least bit frightened, a little breeze sprang up, and coming in through the open window, fanned the child's hot cheeks and damp forehead. It was very pleasant, and the sound of the wind in the trees was pleasant too, for it broke the oppressive stillness. Peggy breathed a sigh of relief, and for the first time a feeling of drowsiness began to steal over her.

She must have fallen asleep, for the next thing she knew she had started up, wide awake again, roused by a strange, unfamiliar sound. The wind was blowing through the room in gusts



now, and the door, which she had purposely left wide open, suddenly shut with a slam.

“What is it—oh, Dorothea, what is it?” cried Peggy, clasping Dorothea in real terror this time. “It sounds like an earthquake, and, oh, that dreadful light in the sky.”

Just then a vivid flash of lightning lit up the room, and was followed by a long low rumble of thunder. With a scream, Peggy was out of bed and at the door.

“Christine, Christine,” she shrieked, rushing out into the hall, and still clutching Dorothea tight; “where are you? Is it an earthquake or a volcano? Oh, Christine, please come quick, I’m so frightened.”

But there was no answer; everything in the house was very quiet. Peggy stood quite still for a moment, and then at sight of another flash of that strange, mysterious light, she forgot that she was in her nightgown, and that her feet were bare—forgot everything in the world but the desire to be near somebody—and with another terrified scream, she flew down the stairs, across the front hall, and with trembling hands, pushed open the door that communicated with the back part of the house.



"Christine," she cried, piteously; "please don't be angry; I had to come, I was so frightened—why, where——"

Peggy got no further, for with a flash the dreadful truth was revealed to her. The kitchen was empty.

"It is an earthquake; oh, it must be one!" screamed the poor, terrified child. "The house is going to fall, and they've run out, Christine and the cook too. Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

Half beside herself with fright, she darted towards the open back door. A gust of wind blew in her face, but she scarcely felt it, and in another moment the little white clad, barefoot girl, was flying down the path. At that very moment Christine, hot and breathless, was hurrying up the front steps; but she did not see Peggy, nor did the child see her.

"We've got to find somebody, Dorothea; we've got to keep right on running till we come to people," gasped Peggy, as another flash of lightning dazzled her eyes, and was followed by a peal of thunder louder than any she had yet heard. "It's dreadful to be out in the street in my nightgown, and without any shoes or





"Save me, save me!"—Page 135.







stockings, but in earthquakes people don't mind such things. Oh, how it does rain!"

Down came the rain, with a rush and a roar, drenching the poor little girl to the skin in a moment. On and on she ran, neither knowing nor caring in what direction, while the lightning flashed, and the thunder pealed over her head. To find somebody who would take care of her; that was her one desire, but every one appeared to be in-doors, for she ran several blocks without meeting a single human being. Then, suddenly, on turning a sharp corner, her straining eyes caught sight of an approaching figure, and with a cry of joy and relief, she rushed towards it, both arms outstretched.

"Save me, save me!" shrieked Peggy. "Oh, I'm so frightened!" and with a hysterical scream, the poor child flung herself into the arms of a tall gentleman, who stopped short, in sheer amazement, and stood gazing down at the dripping, trembling little figure, for a moment, very much as if he found some difficulty in believing the evidence of his own senses.



## CHAPTER IX

### FRIENDS TO THE RESCUE

THE next thing Peggy remembered was something hot being poured down her throat, and a confused sensation of mingled voices and lights. She was lying back in a big rocker, close to a fire, and in a room which appeared to be a kitchen. There were several people crowded about her, all talking excitedly, and a gentleman with a very kind face, was on his knees beside her, holding a spoon to her lips. Peggy stared about her for a moment in puzzled bewilderment, and then came a rush of memory, and she began to tremble again.

“Was it an earthquake?” she inquired, faintly; gazing up into the kind face bending over her.

“An earthquake? No, indeed,” responded a cheery voice. “It was only a thunder storm, and not a very bad one either. What in the



world made you think it was an earthquake?"

"I don't know," said Peggy; "I thought it must be; there was such a dreadful noise, and the light was so queer. Fraulein told me about thunder storms, but I didn't know they were like that. We don't have them in California. They are very terrible, aren't they?"

"Oh, no, they're not. Now swallow this, and you'll feel better."

Peggy swallowed a few drops from the spoon the gentleman was holding to her lips, and it made her cough and choke. Then she discovered that she was wrapped in a coat, which had presumably belonged to the same gentleman, as he was now in his shirt sleeves, and drops of rain were glistening all over him.

"I think I feel better," she announced, sitting up. "I'm very warm."

"That's good, and now here comes my mother. She is the best person in the world to take care of people when they are ill or frightened."

"My dear Maurice," exclaimed an astonished voice in the door-way; "what in the world——"

The speaker paused abruptly, for with a cry of joyful recognition, Peggy had leaned forward, stretching out both hands.



"Why, it's Mrs. Rutherford," she exclaimed. "Don't you know me, Mrs. Rutherford? I'm the little girl who came with Tilly Winkler this morning."

"To be sure you are," said Mrs. Rutherford, hurrying forward, "but why in the world—good gracious, Maurice, the child is in her night-gown and bare feet!"

"I know. That's why I brought her in here, I thought the kitchen fire was the best place for her."

"But where did she come from? How did you find her?"

"I will tell you later, but just at present the most important thing to be done is to get the poor little thing into a warm bed before she is chilled through. I will carry her upstairs, and you and Jennie can do the rest."

Mrs. Rutherford assented, though she still looked very much bewildered, and five minutes later Peggy was being rubbed and dried, and cared for, in a way that was decidedly comfortable. The thunder still growled, and there were occasional flashes of lightning, but she no longer felt in the least afraid.

"And now, Maurice, perhaps you may be able to tell me the meaning of all this amazing busi-



ness," Mrs. Rutherford said, laughing, when Peggy, warm and dry, and wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown, had been comfortably tucked up in bed, and Mrs. Rutherford's son had come in for another look at his patient.

"To tell the truth, mother, I don't know very much myself," the gentleman answered. "I was hurrying home in the storm, when I saw something white rushing towards me, and before I had time to make out what it was, this little girl collapsed in my arms. She was evidently frightened out of her senses."

"You see, I thought it was an earthquake," explained Peggy, raising herself on her elbow, "and I was so frightened. I never saw a thunder storm before, because I've lived in California ever since I was four, and we don't have them there. My sister and brother were out at a dinner party, and when I couldn't find Christine or the cook, I thought they had run out, because they were afraid the house was going to fall, so I ran too. Oh, where is Dorothea?"

"Dorothea?" Dr. Rutherford repeated, looking puzzled; "Who is she?"

"She's my doll. Oh, I hope I didn't drop her."

"I will try to find her for you; don't be so



distressed, but now I want you to tell us your name. We must let your friends know where you are, or they may be frightened about you."

"My name is Peggy Lee," said Peggy, readily. "My sister is Miss Edith Lee, and we live on——"

"Edith Lee!" cried the doctor and his mother both together, and Mrs. Rutherford added, in growing astonishment——

"But I thought you were a friend of the Winkler child. You came with her."

"I'm not exactly a friend of hers," said Peggy, "but I was so sorry for her, because she had to carry that heavy basket, and so I came with her, and we carried it together. I haven't many friends yet; I only came yesterday."

"That explains it," said Dr. Rutherford to his mother. "I knew the Lees had a younger sister living in California with their grandmother, but I did not know they were expecting a visit from her. I must let Edith know at once where she is." And he hurried away, without waiting for any further explanation.

Then Mrs. Rutherford—who seemed a very kind, motherly lady—sat down by the bedside, and holding Peggy's hand in hers, listened with much interest to the little girl's story, of how



she had come all the way from California to see her sister and brother, and the delightful surprise she had given them both.

"And what did your sister say when she heard you had been helping Tilly Winkler carry home the clean clothes?" she inquired with a smile, when Peggy paused at last.

"Why, I haven't told her yet," said Peggy. "You see, she had to go to New York this morning, and when she came back another lady was with her; I didn't like to interrupt at luncheon, and afterwards I forgot all about it. Edith is a very busy young lady; I think perhaps she doesn't have much time to listen to things."

"She went to a dinner party this evening, you say?"

"Yes, and Harry, too. They told Christine to take care of me, but I think she must have been so much frightened by the thunder storm that she ran out the same as I did. Oh, Mrs. Rutherford I'm so worried about Dorothea."

Before Mrs. Rutherford could answer, her son came back into the room.

"The telephone has been put out of order by the storm," he said, hurriedly. "I will go over to the Lees' on my wheel. They may not have discovered anything yet. It is only just ten."



"Very well, dear. Tell Edith not to worry; we will take good care of the little girl to-night, and she can send her clothes over in the morning. I hope you won't be drenched again."

"The storm is almost over," said the doctor, cheerfully. "Good-night, little Miss Pèggy. The sooner you get to sleep the better it will be for you."

"Good-night," said Peggy, holding out her hand. "Please tell Edith I'm all right, and not a bit frightened any more. I suppose Harry will think I'm a baby." Peggy's lip trembled, and the tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, no he won't," said the doctor, and he took the little outstretched hand, and shook it gently. "Grown-up people are sometimes afraid of thunder storms, and to a little girl, who has lived all her life in California, where they are almost unknown, it must have seemed very frightful. Now don't think any more about it, but go to sleep as soon as you can. My mother will take good care of you, and you shall go home early in the morning."

"Your mother is a very kind lady," said Peggy, with a grateful glance at Mrs. Rutherford, "but I do hope you can find Dorothea;



I'm so worried about her. Do you know my sister very well?"

"Yes, I know her very well indeed."

"Don't you think she's the loveliest young lady you ever saw?" inquired Peggy, eagerly.

"She is certainly very lovely," the doctor answered, in a tone of such hearty conviction, that Peggy was quite satisfied.

"If I only knew my dear Dorothea was safe, I think I should be very comfortable indeed," she said, nestling down in the soft warm bed, as Dr. Rutherford left the room. "I'm afraid I must have dropped her in the street when I was so frightened, and if I did I'm sure she must be very wet."

Mrs. Rutherford assured her that search should be made for the missing Dorothea, and then, after kissing the little girl affectionately, she put out the light, and left the room, remarking that Peggy might feel quite comfortable, as her own room was just across the hall, and she would leave both doors wide open.

The rain had ceased, and the moon was just breaking through the clouds, as Dr. Rutherford left his house, and springing on to his bicycle, sped away along the wet streets, in the direction



of the Lee's. He had not gone far when his eye was caught by a white object lying on the sidewalk, which on closer inspection, proved to be the deserted Dorothea; soaked, bedraggled, and with a long crack right across her nose.

"Poor little girl," the doctor said, with a smile, as he shook out Dorothea's dripping garments and deposited her in his overcoat pocket; "I suppose she will be quite heart-broken, but we may be thankful that the calamity was no worse. How could Edith have been so thoughtless as to leave that nervous, excitable child with no one to look after her properly? I hope she hasn't been frightened to death about her."

There were signs of unusual excitement about the Lees' house, as Dr. Rutherford approached it. The front door stood wide open; figures were moving hurriedly about, and he caught the sound of eager, excited voices. As he turned in at the gate, he encountered Harry Lee hurrying down the path.

"Hello, Harry!" called the doctor, cheerfully; "anything wrong?"

"I should say there was. Our little sister——"

Harry got no further, for at that moment a tall figure in a white dress, came running down



the front steps, and the doctor caught a glimpse of a pale, distressed face, and a pair of terrified blue eyes.

"Oh, Maurice," sobbed Edith, seizing her friend's arm, and scarcely conscious of what she said or did in her nervous excitement; "such a frightful thing has happened. My little sister has been stolen."

"Oh, no, she hasn't," said the doctor, smiling reassuringly. "Your little sister is safe and sound at my house, in proof of which fact look here." And he held up the battered Dorothea for Edith's inspection.

"At your house!" cried Edith and Harry both together. "How in the world——"

"Come and sit down, and I'll tell you all about it. Don't tremble so, Edith; I assure you there is nothing seriously wrong."

And then, in a few words, the doctor told his story, to which his two companions listened in breathless interest.

"That wretched Christine!" exclaimed Edith, when she had heard all there was to tell; "how dared she leave the child alone, when I particularly left Peggy in her charge? She says she only ran in next door for a moment to speak to the Miller's maid, but the cook was out, and



there was no one in the house. I shall dismiss her at once."

"I am afraid Christine is not a safe person in whose hands to trust a nervous child," said the doctor, rather gravely. Edith's eyes drooped in sudden self-reproach.

"You are sure the poor little kid won't be any the worse for the affair?" Harry asked, anxiously.

"I don't think it has hurt her at all, thank's to my mother's prompt action, but she must have had a severe nervous shock. Thunder storms are not common in California, and the child had never happened to see one. It isn't surprising that she was frightened."

"I thought of her when the storm came up," said Edith, remorsefully. "I hoped she wouldn't be frightened, but of course I supposed Christine was with her. We had just left the dinner table when I was told some one wanted to speak to me, and in the hall I found Christine, dripping, and almost speechless with terror. She had tried to get us on the telephone, but it was out of order, and so she had run all the way to the Parker's in the rain. It seems, she went upstairs to close the windows, and discovered that



Peggy was gone. Of course my first thought was that the child had been stolen."

"Children are not often stolen in these days," said the doctor, smiling. "Detectives and telephones make that sort of thing rather too difficult. Your little sister is a very attractive child, Edith; mother and I have both taken a great fancy to her."

"She is a sweet little thing," said Edith, heartily. "She will only be with us for a month or two, but I will never leave her alone again at night; that is, unless I have a really trustworthy person to look after her."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said the doctor, dryly, and then they all went into the house together.



## CHAPTER X

### PEGGY WRITES A LETTER AND ENTERTAINS A VISITOR

“MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY,  
“MAY 27TH.

DEAR WINIFRED,—  
“I said I would write you a letter, and I think I will do it this afternoon, because Edith is out, and I am all alone with Joanna. Joanna is the waitress, and she is much nicer than Christine, who was here when I came, but she isn't very fond of talking, and only says “Yes, Miss,” and “No Miss,” most of the time.

“Edith sent Christine away because she went out and left me alone in a thunder storm. Thunder storms are very frightening things I think, but Dr. Rutherford says the reason I felt that way about them is because I have always lived in California, and when I get used to them I won't mind them so much. When I see you I



will tell you about all that happened the night of the storm, but I don't like writing it, because I am afraid I was very silly and babyish. I was a coward, too, for I dropped poor Dorothea, and there is a dreadful crack in her nose. Harry says I deserted my child, and he teases me dreadfully about it. I am afraid Harry thinks me a very silly person; even sillier than Dick and Charlie did. I wish I could do something brave, so he would like me better, but I am afraid I can't, because I never did anything that was the least bit brave in my life.

"I am beginning to love Harry, though he does tease. He is very handsome, and all the young ladies like him very much. He is kind to me, too, even if he doesn't admire me, and last night he brought me a lovely box of candy.

"A great many young ladies come here, and some young gentlemen too. They come to see Edith, because she is such a favorite. She says I may have you to spend the day some time, if you can get some one to bring you, and I do hope you can, because I want to see you so much. She is the most beautiful young lady that ever lived, and I can't tell you how much I love her. I think she is very fond of me, too, and we have beautiful times together. I hook her waists in



the back, and button her boots, and she says I am a great help. I don't think Joanna is much of a help; she can't see very well, and is rather old. Edith says she took her because she was willing to come. She says when people live in the country they have to take the maids who are willing to come, because a great many won't.

"Of all the people who come here, I like Dr. Rutherford best. He took me to his house the night of the thunder storm, and his mother was lovely. I stayed all night, and Edith came in the morning, and brought my clothes. Edith was so good; she kissed me ever so many times, and never scolded me a bit for being a coward. Dr. Rutherford admires Edith very much, which is one reason why I am so fond of him, but his mother says he is good to everybody, and I guess he is.

"The day Edith went to New York to get Joanna, Mrs. Rutherford asked me to lunch, and I had a lovely time. She had a little girl once, whose name was Alice, and who died of diphtheria when she was twelve. Diphtheria is a very bad thing to have, and you generally die when you get it, or else you give it to other people and they die. The boy who gave it to Alice didn't die, but Alice did, and I should think



Mrs. Rutherford would have felt very badly whenever she saw him, but she says it wasn't his fault, and she is very thankful he was spared to his parents. I think that shows she must be very good, and Edith says she is. I asked Edith if Dr. Rutherford wasn't very good, too, but she only laughed, and there was such a pretty color in her cheeks. She calls Dr. Rutherford, Maurice, but of course I don't.

"This is a very long letter, but I like to write, and it is nice to have something to do when every one is out. I think I am as fond of writing as Lulu Bell only I never could write stories the way she does. I told Edith that one about the discovery of New Haven, that you said her aunt put in a book, and she laughed, and said it was very funny. I don't think it was meant to be funny exactly, but Edith laughs a great deal about things.

"All the people who come here are kind to me, but they are grown up. I wish I knew some nice little girls, but Edith doesn't know any, so of course I can't either. Tilly Winkler is nice, and I admire her, because she is so good to her little sisters, but I have only seen her once. Her mother has to go out washing, and she takes care of her two little sisters all day, though she



is only ten. I hope she will bring them to see me some time.

"Now I shall have to stop, because my hand is getting very tired. This is the longest letter I ever wrote; Fraulein's and Aunt Mary's were only half as long, but you are my best friend. Please give my love to your father and mother. I think your mother and Mrs. Rutherford are the two nicest ladies I ever knew, except Edith. Of course she is the dearest, but then, she is my own precious sister.

"With a great deal of love, I am,

"Your very dear friend,

"PEGGY LEE."

Having read over this long letter, with much pride, Peggy folded it carefully, put it in an envelope, and addressed it to "Miss Winifred Hamilton."

"I think she will like it," she said to herself. "It does sound very interesting, and it's just as long as the letters Lulu Bell used to write to her when she was in California. She kept them all in a box, and read them over ever so many times in the train. I wonder if she'll keep mine in a box, too; it would be very complimentary if she did."



Peggy sighed, and a wistful look crept into her face. The fact was, she had missed the pleasant little companion of her journey very much, and there were times when life at Montclair had proved just a trifle dull. She worshipped her sister with an adoring affection, that Edith herself never suspected, and she was really very happy; but she was only ten, and the society of grown-up people is sometimes a little wearisome to children. It was a rainy afternoon, and Edith was out. She had grown a little tired of doing nothing in particular, and the writing of this long letter to Winifred, had proved a great solace.

The letter being finished, however, there really seemed nothing else to do, and a glance at the library clock assured her that it was only half-past four.

"I guess I'll bring Dorothea downstairs for a little change," she decided. "I can take her up again before Harry comes home."

Accordingly, she left the library, where she had been writing, and going up to her own room, tenderly lifted from one of the bureau drawers—which she had converted into a sleeping apartment for Dorothea—the battered remains of what had once been the pretty French doll.



"You poor darling," she murmured, softly kissing the cracked nose, and smoothing the straggly wig, that had once been curly; "were you very lonely all by yourself? It seems a shame to hide you like this, but I can't bear to hear people make impolite remarks about you, especially when I know it was all my fault. Oh, Dorothea dear, it's dreadful to know you've been a coward, and to have your brother tease you about it!"

There were actually tears in Peggy's eyes, but Dorothea's countenance as usual, remained immovable.

"I used to wish you could talk, and understand things," the little girl went on, as she carried her forlorn treasure tenderly downstairs; "but now I think I'm rather glad you're only a doll, because dolls can't blame people, even when they've been cowards. Now we're going to sit in the parlor window, and watch for the postman, so I can give him Winifred's letter. I'll turn your face away from the light, so nobody can see how you look. I don't mind the least bit myself, you know, because I love you even better than I did when you were pretty, but if I had a crack in my nose, I don't believe I should like to have strangers see it, and perhaps you



feel the same way, only you can't talk about it."

For the next fifteen minutes Peggy sat staring out at the falling rain. Then the postman's whistle sounded, and she flew to the front door, to take in the afternoon mail, and to confide her precious letter to his care. She was just turning back into the house, when the sight of a familiar figure coming up the walk, brought a bright smile of welcome to her lips.

"Oh, Dr. Rutherford, I'm so glad to see you," she cried joyously, running out on to the piazza to greet her friend.

"Hello, little one!" said the doctor, pleasantly. "Is your sister at home?"

"No, she isn't; she's gone to a card party, but I wish you would come in and see me. I'll ask Joanna to make you some tea the way she does when people come to see Edith, and it's been a very long afternoon all by myself."

The doctor laughed, but looked a little sorry, too, and he accepted Peggy's invitation so readily, that the little girl felt very much flattered.

"Now, please sit down in the big chair by the window," she commanded, when she had taken the visitor into the parlor, "and I'll run and tell Joanna about the tea. I'll be right back." And away she flew, feeling very important indeed, for



this was the first time she had ever had a grown-up visitor all to herself.

When she returned, after giving her directions to Joanna, she found Dr. Rutherford carefully unwrapping a large pasteboard box, which he had been carrying.

"Is it flowers for Edith?" Peggy inquired, eagerly. "Those you sent her last week were beautiful, and she took such good care of them. No, it can't be; it doesn't look like a flower-box."

"Open it, and see for yourself," said the doctor, smiling; and Peggy, very much interested, and not a little mystified as well, lifted the cover of the box. Next moment she uttered a cry of joyful astonishment.

"Why, it's a doll; a beautiful doll! Oh, Dr. Rutherford, what are you going to do with her? Is she a present for some little girl?"

"She certainly is a present for a little girl," said the doctor, laughing. "Take the young lady out of the box, and see how you like her."

"She's beautiful," said Peggy, lifting the doll from its tissue paper wrappings, and regarding it with admiring eyes. "She looks something like Dorothea did when she was new, but even Dorothea never had such lovely clothes as this



one has. How glad that little girl will be. Does she live in Montclair?"

"Yes, she lives in Montclair, or at least, she is staying here for the present. How do you think Dorothea would like to have a new sister?"

"A sister? You mean—oh, Dr. Rutherford, you mean you are going to give her to me!" Peggy's eyes were sparkling, and her cheeks flushing with pleasure.

The doctor nodded.

"What a very kind gentleman you are," said Peggy, and she spoke from the very bottom of her honest little heart.

The doctor laughed again, and said, "What nonsense;" but he looked more than a little pleased, notwithstanding.

"And how is the unfortunate Dorothea?" he asked, by way of preventing any more expressions of gratitude on Peggy's part.

Peggy's bright face clouded a little.

"She's pretty well," she said. "I wish people wouldn't laugh about her, though; it makes me so uncomfortable, because if I hadn't been a coward she would be all right."

"You poor conscientious little girl," Dr. Rutherford said, and, with a sudden impulse, he drew



Peggy to him, and lifted her on his knee. "I promise never to speak of Dorothea as unfortunate again. There, is that all right?"

"Yes," said Peggy, smiling, though her lip trembled a little. "I know people don't mean to make me uncomfortable, but you see, I was a dreadful coward that night, and I'm so ashamed whenever I think about it. Of course Dorothea can't understand when people say things, because she's only a doll, but sometimes—I suppose it's very silly—but I can't help feeling as if she could. And then I think how she must despise me. A person would despise another person, who had let her drop and crack her nose, just because she was frightened; don't you think so?"

Dr. Rutherford found some difficulty in repressing a smile, but he was really touched by Peggy's remorse.

"You are a good little mother, Peggy," he said. "I wish some real mothers felt more as you do about their responsibilities. Ah, here comes Joanna with the tea. Are you going to pour me out a cup?"

It was pretty to see Peggy doing the honors of the tea table, and Dr. Rutherford, and even the stolid Joanna, watched her with a smile.

"It's the first time I ever made tea for any



one," she explained anxiously, "but I think it looks all right. Please taste it, and tell me if it is."

"It's delicious," the visitor declared, so heartily that Peggy's bosom swelled with pride.

"And what have you been doing all the afternoon?" Dr. Rutherford inquired, as he sipped his tea. Joanna had left the room, and he and Peggy were once more alone together.

"Oh, I did several things," said Peggy, cheerfully. "First, I watered the flowers—Edith said I could—and then I looked out of the window, and watched the children coming home from school. After that I wrote a very long letter to my friend Winifred Hamilton."

"The Hamiltons are the people who brought you on from California, are they not?"

"Yes, and Winifred is my best friend. She's really the only little girl friend I ever had, except Maud Eliot, and we weren't exactly friends, only cousins. I wish Winifred lived in Montclair instead of New York, because then I could see her oftener."

"There are some nice little girls in Montclair," the doctor said. "You must get acquainted with them."

"I should like to, but Edith doesn't know their



mothers. I suppose I shall go to school next winter, and then of course I shall know a great many children. I never went to school in California, because I always had Fraulein, but I think I should like it."

"You expect to be here next winter, then?" The doctor was regarding her with a rather troubled look in his kind eyes.

"Why, yes, of course," said Peggy, laughing. "I'm always going to live here with Edith and Harry. You didn't think I was going back to California, did you?"

Dr. Rutherford was spared the necessity of a reply, for at that moment Peggy caught sight of her sister coming up the walk, and with an eager, "I'll let her in!" she flew to open the front door.

Edith came in, looking very bright and pretty, and Dr. Rutherford noticed with what adoring eyes Peggy followed every movement of her sister's.

"Please let me pour out your tea, Edith," she begged. "I did it for Dr. Rutherford, and he said it was delicious."

Edith laughed, but consented good-naturedly, and Peggy was radiantly happy.

"Just look at the beautiful doll Dr. Ruther-



ford brought me," she cried joyfully, displaying her new treasure for Edith's inspection. "She's going to be Dorothea's sister, and of course I shall love her very much, but I must love Dorothea best, because I let her fall. Isn't Dr. Rutherford kind?"

"He is certainly kind to you," Edith said, and her eyes danced mischievously, like her brother's, as she glanced at the visitor. "I hope you haven't been lonely, pussy-cat," she added, demurely.

"Oh no," said Peggy. "I was just telling Dr. Rutherford about the things I've been doing, and, oh, Edith, he said such a funny thing. I said I supposed I should go to school next winter, and he asked me if I expected to be here then. Wasn't that funny? Just as if I would ever go away again, after coming all the way from California."

Edith said nothing, but she suddenly grew rather red, and changed the subject by asking the visitor a question about his mother.

"Your little sister is devoted to you," the doctor said, when Peggy had gone away to show her new doll to Joanna and the cook.

"She is a darling," said Edith. "Harry and I are both growing very fond of her."



"She evidently has no suspicion of the fact that she is not to spend the rest of her life in Montclair."

Edith looked uncomfortable.

"I know she hasn't," she said, "and it bothers me a good deal. How am I ever going to make her understand without hurting her feelings?"

"You still intend to send her back to California, then?"

The doctor's tone was a little grave, and he looked at Edith keenly as he spoke. But she did not meet his direct gaze, as she answered the question.

"Why, yes, of course. What in the world could Harry and I do with a child on our hands? I shall keep her as long as I can, but I am invited to visit at Bar Harbor in July, and of course I couldn't take her there with me. My aunt writes that some friends of hers, who are now in Europe, expect to return to California in about six-weeks, and she has written to ask if they would be willing to look after Peggy on the journey."

"I am afraid it will be a very keen disappointment to the poor little girl, when she learns the truth," the doctor said, and there was no doubt about the gravity of his tone this time. "Now



I must be off, as I have a patient to see before dinner."

"It's very tiresome in Maurice to take things so seriously," Edith said to herself, as she watched the doctor's tall figure disappearing down the street. "Of course I shall keep Peggy just as long as I can, and do everything in my power to give her a good time while she stays, but to have her always—O dear! I wish people wouldn't say things to make me uncomfortable."



## CHAPTER XI

### THE WINKLERS COME TO CALL

**E**DITH was giving a luncheon party. It was to be a very grand occasion indeed, and Peggy was much impressed by the magnificence of the preparations. Grandma had never given parties of any kind, and this was the first time since she could remember, that the little girl had ever been in a house where an entertainment was to take place. All the morning she had been trotting about, helping Edith and Joanna, and really making herself very useful. She had brought in armfuls of flowers; had filled the parlor vases; assisted in wiping the best china, and finally, giving the finishing touches to her sister's toilet. Now everything was ready; the table set; the white-capped waitress, hired to assist Joanna, arrived, and from her window, Peggy had watched the ladies, in their pretty summer dresses, coming up the walk.

She herself, had been given an early lunch,



and had retired from the scene of action before the arrival of the guests.

"They're all here now," she announced to Dorothea and her new sister Alice—named for Mrs. Rutherford. "Edith said there were to be only twelve, and I've counted them all. It must be very nice to be a grown-up young lady. I suppose it will be a good while before I can go to lunch parties, because I'm only ten, and Edith says people aren't grown-up till they're eighteen, but I can help get ready for other people's parties, anyway, and I guess that's just as much fun. Now, as they're all in the dining-room, and nobody can see us, I think I'll take you both out in the garden for a little while."

Having dressed her children, and put on her own hat, Peggy stole softly downstairs, so as not to be heard by the visitors, and had just stepped out on the piazza, when she caught sight of three small figures coming up the path from the gate.

"Why, it's Tilly Winkler," she exclaimed, in pleased surprise, "and those two little girls must be her sisters." And hastily depositing Dorothea and Alice in a chair, she ran down the steps to greet her friend.

"How do you do?" said Tilly, who was



beaming with satisfaction. "I've brought Cora and Minna."

"I'm very glad to see you all," said Peggy, with a friendly glance at the two very fat little Winklers, whose hair, like their elder sister's, was done up in tight pig tails, and whose faces were shining from a vigorous application of soap and water. "Won't you"—she paused, uncertain whether it would be best to take the visitors in.

"We was coming before," Tilly explained, "only mother was making a new dress for Minna, and we had to wait till it was done. She's got it on now; don't you think it's real pretty?"

"It's—it's very bright," said Peggy, regarding Minna's large plaid a little doubtfully. "I should think it would be a nice, cheerful color."

Tilly looked pleased.

"We all like it," she said. "Minna feels real grand in it; don't you, Baby?"

Minna's only answer was to nod her braids violently, and put her fat thumb into her mouth.

"She can talk plain enough when she wants to," said Tilly, "but she's awful shy with folks she don't know. I guess she'll talk all right when she's been here a while."

"I want to see the inside of your house," an-



nounced six-year-old Cora. Cora at least was not troubled with shyness.

"Yes, oh, yes, of course you shall," said Peggy, hurriedly. "I was only wondering where we'd better go. You see, my sister is having a luncheon party."

"I want some lunch, too," said Cora. "Have they got ice-cream?"

"Oh, Cora," remonstrated Tilly; "it ain't polite to talk like that. Ain't she cute, though?" she added, in a perfectly audible whisper, to Peggy.

"Very," Peggy agreed, politely. "I know what we'll do," she added, with a sudden inspiration. "I'll take you up to my room, and we can play there till the company go, and then I can ask Edith to give us all some ice-cream."

"Maybe it'll be all gone if we don't get it quick," objected Cora. At which Tilly giggled, and remarked; "Oh, you greedy young one!"

Peggy was a little troubled.

"I'm afraid we couldn't possibly have any yet," she said, "because the company haven't had it, but it won't be so very long to wait. Can't you stay and spend the afternoon?"

"That's what we come for," said Tilly. "We can stay just as long as you want us. Mother's



out washing to-day, and she won't be home till late."

"We didn't eat much dinner, 'cause Tilly said maybe you'd give us something good," observed Cora, with painful frankness.

Peggy blushed.

"I wish I could," she said, apologetically. "I had some very nice candy, that my brother brought me, but I'm afraid it's nearly all eaten up. I think there are a few chocolates left, though. Shall we come upstairs now?"

The visitors assented, and the four little girls went up the piazza steps together, Minna clinging to Tilly's hand, and still keeping her thumb in her mouth.

"Are them your dolls?" Cora inquired, as Peggy paused to collect her family. "My, what an awful crack that one's got on her nose. Did you drop her?"

Peggy's eyes drooped, and the color deepened in her cheeks.

"Yes, I did," she admitted, reluctantly. "I'd rather not talk about it, though, if you don't mind. Now, will you please go rather quietly up to my room, so as not to disturb the luncheon party?"

So the four children tiptoed softly into the



house, and up to Peggy's room, where the hostess hastened to comfort the hungry Cora with the remains of her box of chocolates.

"My! but ain't you got a grand room!" remarked Tilly, looking about her admiringly. "You must be awful rich, to have so many pretty things."

Peggy felt rather embarrassed.

"I don't believe we are particularly rich," she said, deprecatingly. "My sister is very fond of pretty things, and all the rooms are nice. Now, wouldn't you like to play something?"

"All right," said Tilly, cheerfully, and the irrepressible Cora added—

"Let's play cops and robbers."

"I'm afraid that would be rather noisy to play in the house," objected Peggy. "Wouldn't you like to play house or paper dolls? I don't think we better make much noise while the lunch party lasts."

Cora looked rather disappointed but Tilly agreed readily, and Peggy was just about to produce the family of paper dolls Edith had given her, when, for the first time since her arrival, the fat Minna removed the thumb from her mouth, and remarked in a very decided little voice—



"Wantsh to hide."

"She means she wants to play hide and seek," Tilly explained. "She'd rather do that than anything else in the world."

Peggy looked doubtful.

"I'm afraid we couldn't——" she began, but Minna, who was evidently accustomed to having her own way, gave Tilly's dress an impatient tug, and repeated firmly——

"Wantsh to hide."

"I guess we'll have to give in to her," said Tilly, regretfully. "She'll begin to cry if we don't and when she gets to holding her breath it's just awful. Maybe we could do it without making much noise. We needn't yell when we find each other; only just jump out and run."

Peggy did not feel so sanguine, but she dared not incur the risk of offending the imperious Minna, who was already showing signs of dissatisfaction, especially as Cora added the information that, when Minna once began to roar, there was no stopping her. Accordingly, the game of hide and seek began, and for the first half-hour all went fairly well. The Winklers did try to be quiet, and what noise they made was drowned by the talk and laughter of the ladies in the dining-room. Still, Peggy was not comfortable,



and when she found Cora hiding in Edith's closet, sheltered behind that young lady's best gown, she began to think that a change of amusement might be desirable.

"Let's play something else for a while," she suggested. "Suppose I read you a story. I've got a lovely book; Mrs. Rutherford lent it to me. It used to belong to her little girl, who died. The stories are quite short, and there aren't any very long words."

"All right," agreed Tilly, who was always ready to do what other people liked. "Just let Cora and Minna hide once more, and then I guess Minna'll be satisfied. You will, won't you, Honey?"

Minna nodded, though whether she understood the nature of the request or not, is doubtful.

"Very well," said Peggy, resignedly. "Please try not to muss things if you hide in closets. I hear the company in the parlor now, so I guess they'll go pretty soon, and then we can have ice-cream."

Cora promised not to do any mischief, and the two little ones departed, Peggy and Tilly dutifully hiding their eyes.

"Now I guess we can go and look for them,"



said Tilly, when everything had been quiet for several minutes. "I wonder where they can be. We've hid all over this floor, haven't we?"

"Yes, we have," said Peggy. "I can't think of another place they could possibly hide in."

"Cora's awful cute," said Tilly, proudly. "She'll be sure to find a good place. Let's look."

They did look, and the next ten minutes was spent in an eager and fruitless search.

"I can't imagine where they can be," said Peggy, who was beginning to look considerably mystified. "They're not anywhere on this floor. You don't suppose they would go upstairs, do you?"

"Hark! what's that?" cried Tilly, in sudden alarm. "It sounds like Minna crying. It is Minna, I know her voice, and Cora's crying too. Oh, where can they be?"

"It sounds as if they were upstairs," said Peggy, and the two children started in hurried pursuit. As they approached the third story, the sounds of wailing became more distinct, and Tilly clasped her hands in nervous apprehension.

"Yes, yes, Minna," she called, quite forgetting her promise not to make any noise. "I'm



coming; I'm right here. Where are you, Honey?"

At the sound of the familiar voice, Minna's roars grew louder, and they were accompanied by the sound of little hands tugging impatiently at a door-knob.

"We can't get out," wailed Cora; "the door won't open, and it's awful dark and horrid."

"They're in the trunk closet!" exclaimed Peggy, in dismay. "They must have got locked in somehow. Oh, I wonder what we'd better do about it!"

Tilly flew to the door, whence the sounds proceeded, and began shaking and pushing it with all her might.

"Turn the key, Cora," she commanded. "Are you locked in?"

"There ain't no key," sobbed Cora. "The door won't open, and we want to come out."

Tilly was actually white with terror.

"If Minna gets to holding her breath, and there ain't nobody to throw cold water in her face, she'll suffocate," she announced, tragically, and then she, too, lifted up her voice and wailed.

"I know; it's a spring lock; I heard Edith say so the other day;" cried Peggy, with a sudden



recollection. "If you shut the door it locks itself, and you have to get a key to open it. I don't know where the key is."

"You've got to find it; I tell you, you've got to right away," screamed Tilly, stamping her foot in her impatience. "If you don't Minna'll die. Oh, Minna, Minna, my precious; I'll let you out just as soon as I can; I truly will!" And Tilly fairly hurled herself against the obdurate door in her distress.

Filled with horror at this dreadful possibility, Peggy turned and fled, never pausing until she appeared, a little white-faced, terrified figure, at the open parlor door.

"Edith," she cried wildly; "oh, Edith, come quick and get the key of the trunk closet! Cora and Minna Winkler are locked in and Tilly says if Minna doesn't get out right away, she'll suffocate."

There was a sudden commotion among the group of young ladies, who were sipping their coffee in the parlor, and in another moment at least half a dozen persons were hurrying upstairs, all talking at once.

"Locked in a closet?" "Is there a window in it?" "Did she say some one was suffocating?" These and other questions were poured





Minna emerged from the trunk closet. — *Page 175.*







forth in rapid succession, and poor Edith was, for the moment, almost too bewildered to comprehend what had really happened.

"Who did you say they were, Peggy?" inquired Miss Harriet Foster, as they all paused in the upper hall, while Edith hurried away in quest of the necessary key.

"The Winklers," explained Peggy. "Cora and Minna, the two little ones, are locked in, and Tilly, their sister, is so dreadfully frightened. They came to spend the afternoon, and we were playing hide and seek. I never thought of their going to hide in the trunk closet."

"The Winklers," began Miss Foster, looking puzzled; "who in the world——" But just then Edith returned, and they all hurried to the third story.

At sight of Miss Lee, Tilly sprang forward, and almost snatched the key from her hand.

"She's stopped yelling," she sobbed; "I think she's holding her breath. Oh, do be quick before she suffocates!"

When, however, the door was unlocked, and the prisoners released, Minna was found to be in a perfectly healthy condition. The reassuring sound of her sister's voice had calmed her fears, and she emerged from the trunk closet serenely



sucking her thumb. Cora had really been the more frightened of the two children. At sight of the visitors Edith grew suddenly very red.

"You must never play in that closet again, Peggy," she said, in a sharper tone than her little sister had ever heard her use before. "Now come downstairs, and wouldn't it be better to let these little girls go home? I think their mother may want them."

There was something in Edith's manner which made Peggy hesitate to make any further explanations, and the four children followed the ladies downstairs, very meekly; but at the foot of the second flight, the incorrigible Cora was heard to whisper——

"Have we got to go without no ice-cream?"

It was an hour later, and Peggy was alone in her room. She was feeling decidedly uncomfortable, though she could not have explained just why. The Winklers had gone home very happy, for Edith—who had heard Cora's remark—had sent them all to the kitchen for ice-cream. Every one had been kind, and the ladies had all laughed a good deal, but though Edith had laughed with the others, there was a something in her manner which convinced Peggy that, for some unknown reason, her sister was displeased



with her. She had heard the voices of the ladies on the piazza, as one after another bade her hostess good-bye, and now the last one had gone, and she heard Edith close the screen door.

“Peggy!”

Edith’s tone was sharp with annoyance, and Peggy’s heart beat fast as she hastened to answer the summons.

“Yes, Edith, I’m here; shall I come down?”

Edith made no answer, but Peggy heard her approaching footsteps, and next moment she entered the room, looking flushed and indignant.

“Peggy,” she began, excitedly; “how could you do such a thing? I am so mortified that I don’t know what to do.”

“What—what did I do?” faltered Peggy, trembling.

“What made you bring those dreadful children into the house?”

“Why, Edith dear, I couldn’t help it. They came to call.”

“Came to call! How absurd! What ever possessed them to do such a thing? Agnes Robinson knows who they are. Their mother takes in washing.”

“I know she does,” said Peggy. “She goes out sometimes, too, and Tilly takes care of Cora



and Minna while she's away. That's why she had to bring them both with her. Tilly is very good and——

“But how came you to know anything about them?” interrupted Edith, impatiently.

“Why, you see,” said Peggy, “I always meant to tell you, but I kept forgetting when you were here, and only remembered the times when you were out. It was the day after I came, and I saw Tilly carrying a dreadfully heavy clothes-basket. I was so sorry for her that I went out and spoke to her. She said her mother told her brother to help her with the basket, but he wouldn't, so she had to carry it all by herself. So I said I would help her, and we carried it together over to Mrs. Rutherford's. The clothes in the basket belonged to a lady who was staying there, and she was very kind, and gave Tilly fifty cents. Tilly wanted me to take half of it, but of course I wouldn't. I liked Tilly so much that I asked her to come and see me, and she said she would bring Cora and Minna, so they came, and—and that's all.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you helped that child carry a clothes-basket through the streets in broad daylight?” Edith had dropped into a



chair, and was regarding her little sister with an expression of horrified amazement.

Peggy hung her head, and her lip quivered.

"I didn't know it was wrong," she said, humbly. "I thought it was just being kind. Oh, Edith dear, please don't be angry; I won't ever do it again; indeed I won't." And poor little Peggy burst into tears.

At sight of the tears Edith's expression softened.

"There, there, don't cry," she said, not unkindly. "It was perfectly dreadful, but of course you didn't know any better. Did you say you took the clothes to Mrs. Rutherford's?"

"Yes," said Peggy, meekly.

"It's queer she has never mentioned it to me, or Maurice either. Well, Peggy, you must never, never do such a thing again, do you understand? Washerwomen's children are not the proper friends for you, and I don't wish you ever to ask those people to the house again. Goodness only knows what people will say about it. Of course those girls will tell the story all over town. I really feel disgraced, and it just proves how unfit I am to have the care of a child."

At this dreadful assertion, poor Peggy's grief



broke forth with redoubled violence, and she flung her arms around her sister's neck, in a passion of sorrow and remorse.

"Oh, you are, you are!" she sobbed. "You're the dearest, sweetest person in the world, and you take the very best care of me that anybody possibly could. Oh, I'm so sorry I was a disgrace, but I won't ever be again, indeed, indeed I won't! Oh, please forgive me this time, and try not to mind so very much!"

Edith was mollified, though still a little impatient.

"Hush, Peggy, don't be such a baby," she said, kissing the little tear-stained face, "and don't hug me quite so tight. You are the queerest child I ever saw; you take everything so dreadfully seriously. There, there, I'm sorry I scolded. It was perfectly ridiculous." Suddenly Edith's sense of humor got the better of her other feelings, and she began to laugh.

Peggy was much relieved.

"You're not so very angry, then, are you?" she said, eagerly.

"No, no, I'm not angry, but, oh, Peggy, you are such a funny little thing. How you must have looked carrying that clothes-basket." And Edith laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.



Peggy was a little hurt. Like most sensitive children, she objected to being laughed at, but at the same time, it was a great comfort to know that her sister was not really angry.

"I'm sorry you don't like to have me play with the Winklers," she said regretfully, as she dried her eyes. "You see, I haven't any other people to play with, and Tilly is such a good girl."

Edith's conscience gave her an uncomfortable little twinge.

"I know you haven't any one to play with," she said, "and you must be dreadfully lonely sometimes. I ought not to leave you as often as I do, but I have so many engagements——"

"Oh, I'm not a bit lonely; indeed I'm not!" cried Peggy, earnestly. "I was only just thinking that it was nice to have people come to see me sometimes, but I'd rather be with you than anybody else in the world. Besides, when I go to school next winter, I shall have lots of friends."

Edith said nothing, but she rose rather quickly, and went over to look out of the window, for no apparent reason. It was not the first time that she had found it impossible to meet the innocent gaze of her little sister's brown eyes.



## CHAPTER XII

### PEGGY OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION

**D**R. RUTHERFORD called again that afternoon. Indeed, he was a very frequent visitor at Miss Lee's and at the sound of his automobile, Peggy—who was reading a story book on the piazza—looked up with a bright welcoming smile.

“Edith's out,” she announced, as the doctor brought his machine to a stop beside the front steps. “She's gone to play golf, with Miss Foster and some other people, but I think perhaps she'll be back pretty soon.”

The doctor looked disappointed, and half inclined to go away again, but something in the expression of Peggy's face caused him to change his mind. He was naturally fond of children, and had taken a particular fancy to his friend's little sister.

“Edith has gone to play golf, has she?” he said, pleasantly, as he came up the steps, and



seated himself on the wicker sofa. "Well, and how have you been getting on, little woman?"

Peggy smiled, but the smile was followed by a sigh.

"I did something dreadful to-day," she said, mournfully. "I disgraced Edith."

Dr. Rutherford laughed, and motioned to Peggy to take the vacant place beside him.

"How did that happen?" he inquired, so kindly that Peggy felt somehow cheered and comforted, though she could not have told why.

"I didn't mean to do it," she said, sorrowfully. "I didn't know it was a disgrace to have the Winklers spend the afternoon. They all had to come, because Tilly takes care of them when their mother goes out to wash. It was rather unfortunate they came to-day, because Edith was having a luncheon party, but I thought we could play quietly, and it was all right till Cora and Minna hid in the trunk closet, and the door got locked. Tilly was so afraid Minna would hold her breath and suffocate, that I had to call Edith, and then all the ladies came up, and afterward Edith said I had disgraced her."

Dr. Rutherford laughed such a hearty, merry laugh, that Peggy could not find it in her heart to blame him.



"You poor little girl," he said; "is that all?"

"Yes," said Peggy, brightening. "Do you think it was very dreadful?"

"Not so very; was Edith really angry?"

"I think she was at first, but afterward she laughed, and before she went out she kissed me, and told me not to think any more about it; but it's a very uncomfortable thing to feel you've been a disgrace, don't you think so?"

"I suppose it would be if it were true, but in your case I can't see that you have done anything so very bad. I know the Winkler family. Their mother often works for us, and I attended them through measles in the winter. The eldest girl—Tilly I think her name is—is a real brick. She is a little mother to her younger sisters."

"Yes, indeed she is," cried Peggy, her face brightening at this praise of her friend. "I admire her very much, and I'm so glad you do too. I helped her carry home some clean clothes once, when the basket was very heavy, and that's another thing that Edith said was a disgrace."

"Oh, she didn't mean it," said Dr. Rutherford, reassuringly. "Your sister is much too sensible for that sort of nonsense. By the way, as she isn't likely to be back from the links in some



time, suppose you come home with me in the automobile. My mother will be having afternoon tea about this time, and she's always glad to see you."

Peggy sprang to her feet with alacrity.

"I'd love to go," she said, and ran into the house for her hat.

The next hour was a very happy one to the little girl. First came the short ride in the doctor's fascinating automobile, then the kindly welcome from Mrs. Rutherford, and lastly, the comfortable little talk, when she sat cuddled on the kind old lady's lap. Mrs. Rutherford loved all children, but Peggy had a very warm place in her heart, partly from a fancied resemblance between her and the little Alice who had died so many years ago. She understood the quaint, old-fashioned child better than most people did, and with a few tactful questions, she soon learned the cause of Peggy's unusually grave face. Then, she too, was warm in her praise of the Winklers, and Peggy went home much cheered and comforted.

"I don't suppose Edith will mind my admiring Tilly, as long as I don't invite her to come to see me, do you, Dr. Rutherford?" she inquired anxiously, as the doctor was taking her



home, to which he replied decidedly, that he was quite sure she would not.

Both Edith and Harry had returned before Peggy reached home, and she found her brother and sister on the piazza. Dr. Rutherford would not come in, as he had a patient to see, but he called a cheery good-night from the gate, and puffed away in his automobile, leaving Peggy to walk up the path alone.

"Well, Peg-Top, so you have been entertaining afternoon callers," remarked Harry, with a mischievous glance at his little sister, as she came up the piazza steps.

Peggy blushed. She was really growing very fond of her merry, light-hearted brother, though she still found his constant teasing a little hard to bear.

"I also hear that you have been playing the good Samaritan, and helping to bear other people's burdens," Harry went on. "I didn't know before that we had a philanthropist in the family."

"Don't tease her, Harry," said Edith, good-naturedly. "Have you had a good time, pussy-cat?"

"Oh, yes," said Peggy; "I do love Dr. Rutherford so much, and Mrs. Rutherford too. They



both admire Tilly Winkler very much. Dr. Rutherford called her a real brick, and he doesn't believe you'll mind my admiring her, so long as I don't ask her to come here any more."

"I don't mind in the least," said Edith, laughing, "but remember, you are not to carry clothes-baskets through the streets again."

Peggy promised that she would not, and she was just going into the house to take off her hat, when Harry put out his hand, and drew her back.

"Give us a kiss, kiddie," he said, and he bent and kissed her with more tenderness than he had ever shown before.

"Oh, how dear they are, and how happy I am," thought Peggy, as she ran upstairs to her room. "I don't believe anybody in the world has such a lovely sister and brother as I have."

Edith and Harry both dined at home that evening. This was always a great pleasure to Peggy, for when not otherwise engaged, they were disposed to pet and make much of her. It was a very warm evening for early June, and after dinner they all went out on the piazza, and Harry brought his mandolin, and sang college songs greatly to his little sister's delight. Miss Foster and her brother dropped in for a call, and



they were having a very merry time together when, at half past eight, Peggy bade them good-night. Edith had no strict rules about children's bed-time, but Peggy, mindful of grandma's discipline, seldom remained up later than half-past eight.

"I think grandma would be glad if she knew I tried to do the things she wanted me to," she had once confided to Dorothea; but she said nothing about it to any one else.

Peggy had struggled bravely against her babyish fear of the dark, and Edith never guessed how fast the little heart sometimes beat, when the child bade her a cheerful good-night, and went upstairs by herself. She had also learned to braid her own hair, and to do many other little things for herself, so as not to be obliged to call upon Joanna for assistance. But although she was much less timid than she had been a few weeks before, it was very pleasant on this particular evening, to hear the voices of her friends on the piazza, just under her window.

"It does make a person feel very comfortable to know other people are near," she said, as she crept into bed with Dorothea. Alice, the new doll, slept in a corner of the sofa, but the bat-



tered Dorothea still shared her little mother's bed.

"I know dolls can't understand things," she had explained to Edith, on the night of Alice's arrival; "but I can't help thinking Dorothea might feel hurt if I took any one else to bed with me, and I've got to be kinder to her than ever now, because I let her fall and crack her nose."

Edith had laughed and called her "a silly little monkey," but she had kissed her with unusual tenderness that night.

It was very warm, even with both windows open, and perhaps that fact, coupled with the sound of voices on the piazza, prevented Peggy from going to sleep as soon as usual. At any rate, she did not go to sleep, but lay tossing from side to side, thinking of all sorts of things, until at last, feeling very warm and uncomfortable, she jumped out of bed again.

"I'll sit by the window a few minutes and get cool," she decided, "and then perhaps I can go to sleep right away."

Accordingly, she drew a low chair to the window, and sat resting her arms on the sill, and letting the soft night air cool her forehead and cheeks. It was very peaceful and pleasant.



From the piazza below came the sound of voices, for the visitors still lingered, and now and then Harry struck a few chords on his mandolin. Peggy could hear every word of the conversation, but it did not interest her particularly, and she was just thinking that she would go back to bed again, when a remark of young Mr. Foster's attracted her attention.

"That little sister of yours is a remarkably attractive child, Miss Edith," he spoke. "The Rutherfords dined with us last night, and Mrs. Rutherford repeated some of her quaint remarks."

Peggy leaned a little farther out on the window sill. This was very pleasant, and in her interest she quite forgot that it is dishonorable to listen to conversation not intended for one's ears.

"She is a sweet little thing," was Edith's hearty rejoinder. "Harry and I are both getting quite foolish about her. I am afraid we should spoil her dreadfully if we had her with us very much longer."

"Isn't she going to live with you?" Mr. Foster inquired, in some surprise.

"Oh, no; she has only come for a short visit. She was rather poorly after our grandmother's



death, and the doctor advised change of scene, so my aunt sent her to stay with us for a time. We should like to keep her all summer, but it doesn't seem possible, so she is to go back to California with some friends of my aunt's, about the first of July. Poor little girl, she doesn't suspect it yet, and I declare, it makes me fairly ill when I think of telling her."

The Fosters stayed a little longer, and then Harry and Edith walked part way home with them, so that it was considerably after ten o'clock when Edith came up to her room. She undressed slowly, for it was warm, and she was not very sleepy, and she had just put out her light, and gotten into bed, when there was a slight sound at the door, and a little white clad figure glided into the room.

"What's the matter?" Edith inquired, lifting her head from the pillow. "Why, Peggy, is it you? Why aren't you asleep?"

"I couldn't go to sleep," said Peggy in a tremulous little voice. "I'm very sorry, but I couldn't. Edith dear, I know you don't like to have people sleep with you, but I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind just this once. I'm so very lonely."



"Why, you silly baby; what are you afraid of?" Edith spoke rather impatiently.

"I'm not afraid of anything," faltered Peggy; "only—only—oh, Edith darling, please let me stay." And to Edith's surprise, her little sister suddenly sprang into bed beside her, and flung both arms passionately round her neck.

"Why, Peggy, my dear child, what is the matter? Your hands and feet are cold. Are you ill, dear?"

"Oh, no, I'm not ill, but I was so lonely all by myself, and I wanted to get close to somebody. I'll be very, very quiet, if you'll only let me stay."

Edith was touched.

"Of course you may stay," she said, kindly, "but really, Peggy dear, you are a great baby. I always slept by myself when I was your age, and never dreamed of being afraid of anything."

Peggy said nothing, but nestled in her sister's arms, and pressed her cheek close to Edith's, and something in that loving touch stirred a feeling in the elder sister's heart, that she did not know existed there before. Peggy only spoke once more, and that was just as Edith was dropping off to sleep.

"Edith," she said, softly, "this is only the third of June, isn't it?"



"Yes, dear."

"And there are—how many days are there in June?"

"Thirty. Now go to sleep, Peggy; you said you would be quiet, you know."

Peggy gave a little sigh.

"I won't talk any more, only three out of thirty leaves twenty-seven, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Edith, sleepily.

"Then there will be twenty-seven more days before it's July. Twenty-seven days is really a good while, isn't it?"

But Edith was already asleep.



## CHAPTER XIII

### TROUBLE AT THE WINKLERS'

I'M very sorry to have to be away all day, Peggy," Edith remarked, at the breakfast table, a few mornings later; "but of course I must go to Charlotte Leroy's wedding. She and I were old school friends. I wish she were going to be married in New York instead of at Ardsley, for it will take pretty nearly the whole day to go and come. Joanna will take good care of you while I'm away."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Peggy, but though she spoke cheerfully, it was not quite in her old bright way, and Harry—who was just finishing his breakfast—looked at her keenly.

"Doesn't it strike you that the kid has been a bit out of sorts lately?" he said to Edith, when, at the sound of the postman's whistle, Peggy had run to bring in the morning mail.

Edith looked surprised.

"Why, no, I haven't noticed anything unusual



about her," she said. "She is such a little mouse of a child that she is always quiet."

"Well, I would keep an eye on her if I were you," Harry said, and his tone was graver than usual. "I found her curled up in the hammock with that forlorn remnant of a doll, when I came home last evening, and I would wager a good deal she'd been crying."

"O dear," said Edith, who was beginning to look troubled, "I hope she isn't going to be ill. I can't imagine any other reason for her crying. I'm sorry about that tiresome wedding, but I don't see how I can very well give it up."

"Oh, I don't believe that is necessary," said Harry, rising from the table. "She may have been a little homesick. It's only natural she should miss the Eliot children sometimes. I'll tell you what we'll do. To-morrow is Saturday, and I have the day off. What do you say to going down to Dreamland for the afternoon and evening, and taking the kid with us? A whiff of sea air will do her good, and she'll enjoy the show."

"That would be very nice," said Edith, but she spoke without much enthusiasm, and just then Peggy returned, her hands filled with letters and papers.



"There's a letter for me," she announced joyfully. "I think it's from Winifred Hamilton. Would you mind reading it to me, Edith? It takes me such a long time to read letters."

Edith laughed, but good-naturedly opened the letter, and read it before looking over her own mail.

"NEW YORK, MAY 6TH.

"DEAR PEGGY,—

"Your splendid long letter came, and I loved it. I took it to school, and at recess I read it to Lulu and Gertie, my two best friends. Lulu said it was very interesting, and she would like to know you. I think your sister must be lovely, and I am so glad you are having such a good time.

"This is not going to be a long letter at all, but is just to ask if you will come on Saturday, and spend a few days with me. Father and mother both want you, and father says if you come he will take us all down to Dreamland on Saturday afternoon. We will invite Lulu, too, so she can meet you. Mother says she will come to the ferry for you Saturday morning, if your brother will bring you in, and if you haven't time to answer this letter you can telephone.



" ' Please do come ; I want to see you so much. Mother sends her love, and says to tell your sister she will take good care of you. I send a great deal of love, too, and some kisses, and I remain,

" ' Your sincere friend,

" ' WINIFRED HAMILTON."

Edith looked up from the letter with a bright smile.

" How very nice," she said. " Of course you can go. You would like to, wouldn't you, dear? "

But Peggy did not smile. She was looking very grave indeed, and there was a wistful, pleading look in her eyes, which puzzled Edith. Harry had already hurried away to catch his train.

" You would like to go, wouldn't you? " Edith repeated, as Peggy remained silent.

" Do you want me to go? " the little girl asked, and her voice was not quite steady.

" Oh, yes, dear, of course—that is, if you want to. Why, Peggy, what is the matter? I thought you would be delighted. You seemed so fond of the little Hamilton girl."

" I am," said Peggy. " I love her very much,



and she is my best friend, but—but I think I'd a little rather not go, if you don't mind."

"My dear child," said Edith, laughing, "I am sure I don't mind. I wouldn't have you go for the world unless you wanted to. I only thought it would be a pleasure to you to visit your friends."

Peggy's head drooped, and her cheeks were crimson.

"You're sure I won't be a bother if I don't go?" she said, timidly.

"You are never a bother," was Edith's prompt reply, and with a sudden impulse, she stooped and kissed the troubled little face.

Peggy looked much relieved.

"Then I think I will write Winifred a letter," she said. "I'll thank her for asking me, but I'll say I would rather not leave you."

Edith's conscience gave her another of those uncomfortable little twinges, which were becoming so frequent of late, but she tried to laugh.

"Very well," she said, lightly; "do just as you please, only I hope you won't be sorry afterward. I thought you were so anxious to have little girls to play with, and now you have the opportunity, and you won't take it. You are a funny little kid, as Harry says. Now I must



hurry and dress, or I shall miss my train. You had better write your letter at once, and I will post it in town."

Edith hurried away upstairs, and Peggy seated herself at the library desk, where she wrote the following note:

"MONTCLAIR, JUNE 7TH.

"DEAR WINIFRED,—

"I should love to come and make you a visit, and meet Lulu Bell, except for one thing. When I came I thought I was going to live here always with Edith and Harry, but I am not. I am to go back to California on the first of July, to live with Aunt Mary and the children. There are only twenty-three more days till then, and so you see, I don't like to leave Edith even to stay with you. I hope you won't mind, because I am your best friend, just the same. Edith says I won't be a bother if I stay, and I do want to be with her every minute till the first of July.

"I must send this letter right away, so you will get it before to-morrow. Edith is going to post it in New York.

"I am,

"Your very loving friend,

"PEGGY LEE."



Peggy wiped her eyes before she folded her letter and put it into an envelope. It would have been very pleasant to see the Hamiltons again, and to visit Winifred in her own home, but there were only twenty-three more days in June.

Edith had nearly finished dressing, when the tinkle of a sharp little bell summoned her to the telephone.

"Is this Miss Lee's house?" a familiar voice inquired.

"Yes; is that you, Maurice?"

"Oh, is it you, Edith? I called up to tell you that I won't be able to dine with you this evening. My brother in Albany has a sharp attack of appendicitis, and his wife has telegraphed for mother and me to come at once. We hope to get off on the eleven-thirty."

Edith expressed her sympathy and regret, and she was just about to hang up the receiver, when Dr. Rutherford said——

"Oh, by the way; there is something else I want to tell you. There are several cases of diphtheria in Frog Hollow. Don't let Peggy go into that neighborhood."

"No, I won't, of course; not that there is any likelihood of her wanting to go there."



"Well, I didn't know. Her friends the Winklers live there, and she is a democratic little person. Better warn her."

"Yes, I will. Good-bye, Maurice. I do hope you will find your brother better when you reach Albany. Give my love to Mrs. Rutherford."

Peggy was waiting at the foot of the stairs, with her letter, when Edith came hurrying down, ten minutes later.

"I'm dreadfully late," she explained rather breathlessly, as she took the letter from her little sister's hand, and gave Peggy a hurried kiss. "I shall have to run all the way to the station or I shall miss my train. Good-bye, darling; don't be lonely."

In another moment Edith was hurrying down the street, while Peggy stood on the piazza, looking after her with loving, wistful eyes. It was not until she had nearly reached the station, that Dr. Rutherford's warning flashed across her mind.

"There; I forgot to tell Peggy," she said to herself, a little impatiently; "but of course it's all right; she would never dream of going to such a place." And just then, she caught sight of a friend, and promptly banished the matter from her mind.



Peggy felt rather desolate when she found herself alone. There were only twenty-three more days, and one of them was going to be lost, for Edith had said she would not be at home until dinner time. However, there was no use in fretting, and besides, she had work to do, so she stifled a sigh, and ran upstairs for the little white shawl she was crocheting for Edith's birthday. That scarf had caused Peggy a great deal of anxiety, for of course it was to be a surprise, and she lived in constant fear of her sister finding out before the proper moment arrived. It was kind Mrs. Rutherford, to whom she had confided her desire to make a beautiful birthday present for her sister, who had provided the materials, and taught her the stitch. To-day there was no danger of being discovered by Edith, so she brought her work down to the piazza, and prepared to spend a very busy morning. The birthday was not for another week, but there was still a good deal to do on the scarf, and there might not be another such favorable opportunity for working. So all the warm summer morning the little fingers flew, and to such good purpose that Joanna, when she came to call her to luncheon, exclaimed in astonishment at her progress.



"I think I'll go to see Mrs. Rutherford this afternoon," Peggy remarked, as she rose from the luncheon table. "She'll be interested to hear how the scarf is getting on, and I haven't seen her since Monday."

Joanna made no objection, so Peggy put on her hat, and set off by herself for the short walk to the Rutherford's. But her hopes of spending a pleasant afternoon with her kind friend were doomed to disappointment, for when she reached the doctor's house, it was only to learn from the maid, that Mrs. Rutherford and her son had both been called away by illness in the family, and it was uncertain when they would be able to return. With a sigh of disappointment, Peggy turned once more in a homeward direction.

She had just left the Rutherford's front gate, when her attention was attracted by a very small girl, who was hurrying rapidly towards her.

"Why, it's Cora Winkler," she exclaimed, her face brightening. "I wonder what she's doing out all by herself. She's only six."

The recognition was evidently mutual, for at sight of Peggy, Cora quickened her pace to a run.



"Say!" she demanded, reaching Peggy's side in a rather breathless condition; "which is Dr. Rutherford's house?"

"It's this one," said Peggy, "but he isn't at home. He's gone away, and Mrs. Rutherford too. The waitress said she didn't know when they would be back."

"O dear!" said Cora, and she looked so crest-fallen, that Peggy hastened to inquire——

"Did you want to see him very much?"

"I want him for Minna," said Cora; "she's awful sick."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Peggy, sympathetically; "what's the matter with her?"

Cora shook her braids.

"I don't know," she said. "She had a cold this morning, and mother gave her some medicine before she went out to wash, but she's got worse since, and Tilly's awful scared. She told me to run and get Dr. Rutherford right away, and now he ain't there."

"It's too bad," said Peggy, looking troubled. "I wonder what we ought to do about it."

"I don't know," said Cora, who, to tell the truth, did not look particularly interested. "I guess I'll go home and tell Tilly."

"You're rather little to go all the way by



yourself," said motherly Peggy, with a troubled glance at the sturdy Cora. "Are you always very careful about crossing the streets? Those automobiles come so very fast sometimes, you know."

"One of them things 'most run over me, coming," remarked Cora, tranquilly. "The folks yelled, and I was scared."

Peggy reflected for a moment in silence. The prospect of a long, solitary afternoon at home was not alluring. She was tired of crocheting, and there didn't seem to be anything else to do. Edith had never forbidden her to call on the Winklers', although she had objected to their calling on her. Dr. Rutherford admired Tilly, and now Tilly was in trouble. Cora was very little to go about by herself. She felt sure Tilly would never have sent her for Dr. Rutherford if she had not been very anxious about Minna.

"Would you like me to come home with you?" she inquired, suddenly. "Perhaps I can help Tilly to take care of Minna."

"All right; come along," said Cora, cheerfully, and she slipped a not very clean little hand into Peggy's.

Frog Hollow was not an attractive neighborhood, and Peggy—who had never been in that



part of the town before—found herself gazing in wonder at the shabby houses, and untidy children, who thronged the sidewalk. Cora apparently had many friends among the children, for she was constantly being hailed by one or another, and at the door of a rather tumble-down cottage, she suddenly dropped Peggy's hand, and remarking briefly, "that's our house; I'm going to play;" darted off in pursuit of a group of her friends.

Peggy climbed the rickety wooden steps, and knocked at the door. She waited several minutes, and then, receiving no answer to her knock, she ventured to turn the handle. Somewhat to her surprise, the door opened at once, and next moment she found herself standing in a small, narrow hall.

"Tilly," she called softly; "Tilly, are you there?"

There was a sound of approaching footsteps, and Tilly appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Is it you, Cora?" she inquired in an anxious whisper, "and is he coming right away?"

"It isn't Cora," said Peggy, advancing further into the hall. "I met her outside of Dr. Rutherford's gate, and I came home with her. She was so little to go by herself, and she said an



automobile nearly ran over her. I'm so sorry about Minna; is she very ill?"

"I guess she is," said Tilly, who had by this time reached the foot of the stairs, and was regarding the visitor in pleased surprise. "Is Dr. Rutherford coming soon?"

"No," said Peggy; "he can't; he's gone away. Oh, Tilly, don't cry. What's the matter?" For at the announcement that Dr Rutherford was not coming, Tilly had promptly burst into tears.

"O dear, O dear! what shall I do?" she sobbed helplessly. "Minna so awful sick, and I thought he'd come and make her well right away. She was sick this morning when mother went out, but she's got so much worse, and I know mother'll be scared to death."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Peggy, and she slipped an arm affectionately about her friend's waist, and kissed her. "Perhaps she isn't really so very ill. Where is she?"

"Up in mother's bed. I undressed her and put her there when she got worse. I guess she's asleep, but she moans all the time, and makes such queer noises in her throat."

"Let's go up and see her," suggested Peggy, and Tilly promptly led the way up the steep, narrow stairs, to a small, hot room, where Minna,



her eyes closed and her cheeks flushed with fever, was lying in the middle of a large feather bed.

"She's feverish," said Peggy, with a professional air, as she bent down, and softly touched the sick child's hot forehead. "I was feverish when I was ill after grandma died, and the doctor said I needed a change. I got well pretty soon, though. Perhaps Minna will be all right to-morrow."

Tilly looked somewhat relieved.

"I hope she'll be better when mother comes home," she said; "she'll be so scared. Do you think a doctor ought to see her?"

"I think it might be just as well," said Peggy, thoughtfully. "Dr. Scott came to see me when I was feverish; Aunt Mary sent for him. Are there any other doctors in Montclair except Dr. Rutherford?"

"Oh, yes," said Tilly; "there are a good many others, only we don't know them. Besides, they'd all charge. Dr. Rutherford treats us free."

Peggy looked doubtful.

"Perhaps you'd better wait and ask your mother, then," she said.

At that moment Minna opened her eyes, and in a thick, hoarse little voice, demanded a drink



of water. Tilly brought some in a cup, and while she held it to Minna's lips, Peggy lifted the sick child's head, and gently supported it on her arm.

"Drink it, Honey, drink it," said Tilly, in a tender, soothing voice, such as her mother might have used; but though Minna took the water in her mouth, she did not swallow it.

"It hurts! it hurts," she moaned fretfully, pointing to her throat.

"I guess her throat is sore," said Peggy, with a sudden inspiration. "My throat was sore once last winter, and it was very horrid. Fraulein made me gargle it with listerine. Have you got any listerine?"

Tilly shook her head.

"I don't know what it is," she said.

"Then," said Peggy, with decision, "I really think you ought to have a doctor come and see her. If you tell me where one lives, I'll stop and ask him to come, on my way home. Minna has gone to sleep again, I think."

"You're real kind," said Tilly, gratefully. "I guess I'll get Dr. Johnson. Most of the folks round here has him, but we always have Dr. Rutherford, because mother works there, and he doesn't charge us nothing."



"I guess you had better have him," said Peggy. "Minna does feel very hot, and perhaps your mother mightn't like it if you didn't. Where does he live?"

Tilly mentioned a street, which Peggy knew well, and after a few more anxious speculations about Minna's condition, the visitor rose to go.

"I guess she'll be all right to-morrow," she said, encouragingly, as Tilly followed her to the head of the stairs. And Tilly cheered by the encouraging words, smiled hopefully.

Once in the street, Peggy walked fast. She did not like the neighborhood, and was anxious to reach more familiar ground as soon as possible. At the corner of the street she encountered Cora, who, with several other children, had paused before a house, on the door of which a sign in large letters had been pasted. The children were regarding the sign with much interest, and as Peggy drew near she heard one little girl spelling laboriously——

"'DIPHThERIA.' What does that spell?"

"I don't know," said Cora. Then, catching sight of Peggy, she ran up to her, inquiring eagerly——

"Say! what's the word on that sign?"



Peggy glanced up at the ominous word, and her heart gave a sudden jump.

"It's diphtheria!" she said, in a frightened voice. "Don't stay here; it's dangerous." And she seized Cora's hand, and hurried her away.

"It's something catching, ain't it?" demanded Cora, finding some difficulty in keeping up with Peggy's rapid pace.

"It's a dreadful thing; people die of it," responded Peggy, solemnly. "Mrs. Rutherford had a little girl who died of it. Don't go near there again, and tell the others not to either. Don't you think you'd better go home and see if you can't help Tilly? She's so worried about Minna."

"All right," said Cora, and slipping her hand out of Peggy's, she darted away in a homeward direction.

Peggy had no difficulty in finding Dr. Johnson's house, but the maid who opened the door, informed her that the doctor was out. However, she wrote the Winkler's name and address on the doctor's slate, and Peggy departed, feeling quite easy in her mind about Minna.

"He'll make her all right in a little while," she thought, cheerfully. "I'm glad Tilly didn't



say anything about coming to see me again. She's very nice indeed, and I admire her, but I wonder why poor people's houses aren't a little cleaner."

When Peggy reached home, she found Joanna in a state of much excitement. Mr. Lee had telephoned that he was bringing some young married friends home with him that evening, and there was a great deal to be done to get things ready for the unexpected visitors. Peggy's heart sank, and she had some difficulty in keeping back the tears of disappointment. She had so hoped to have Edith to herself, and now her sister would be too busy to take much notice of her. But Peggy was a cheerful little soul, and so, instead of going away by herself to brood over her disappointment, she offered to help Joanna, and spent a very busy afternoon, arranging flowers, dusting ornaments, and making herself really useful in many ways.

The family returned with their visitors, just in time for dinner. Edith was tired, but in good spirits, and Mr. and Mrs. Ward proved to be very pleasant young people. Everybody was very kind to Peggy, but no one had much time to devote to her, and there was no opportunity for private conversation with Edith.



"I never told about Minna," the little girl said to herself, as she was getting into bed that night. "I meant to speak to Edith about her, but she was so busy, and perhaps if I had told her she wouldn't have been interested. I don't think she cares very much for the Winklers. O dear! only twenty-two more days! I never knew time went so fast before."



## CHAPTER XIV

### EDITH'S BIRTHDAY

THE little white scarf—the work of so many patient hours—was finished at last, and Peggy stood regarding the result of her labor, with a smile of pardonable pride. Another week had slipped away and now there were only sixteen more days till the first of July. Still, Peggy had heard no word of her return to California, and she was beginning to hope that Edith and Harry might possibly have changed their minds on the subject. It was only a very faint little hope, but there was untold comfort in it, for every day it seemed to the child that her sister and brother grew kinder and more loving, while life in the pretty, cheerful little house grew sweeter and sweeter.

“I don’t see how I can go,” she said to her old confidante, Dorothea, “when I’m getting to love them better every minute, but I shouldn’t like to stay and be a bother.” And then she



set her lips tight, and winked hard to keep back the tears, that seemed so near the surface in these days.

But this morning she did not feel in the least like crying, though her head ached and her throat was sore, for this was Edith's birthday, and the secret which had been kept with so much difficulty, was not to be a secret any longer. Already she had stolen more than once to her sister's door, in the hope of hearing some sound that would tell her Edith was awake, for the scarf, finished the previous afternoon, was to be carried in and flung around her shoulders the very moment Edith should open her door.

"I wonder why grown-up people like to stay in bed so long," she said, impatiently, glancing at the clock, the hands of which pointed to just five minutes past seven. "I'm glad the Wards went away yesterday. They were very nice, but I do want my precious Edith all to myself on her birthday, especially when there are only sixteen more days."

Just then her listening ears caught the sound of a blind being thrown back in her sister's room, and with a joyful cry of "she's awake," she snatched up the scarf, darted across the hall, and was knocking at Edith's door in a moment.



What a truly delightful surprise that was. Edith was as much pleased as possible, and pronounced the little scarf one of the most useful presents she had ever received, and just the thing to wear over her head when she went out of an evening.

"And you really made it all by yourself," she said. "Oh, Peggy dear, how could you take all that trouble for me?"

"I loved it," said Peggy, simply, and her eyes shown with such unutterable love and admiration, that Edith turned her head away with a suddenly heightened color. Her little sister's devotion was touching her more and more deeply.

Breakfast that morning was a very happy meal, and if Peggy ate less than usual, nobody noticed the fact. Harry's present to his sister was a lovely pin, set with pearls, and there were several smaller gifts from intimate friends. The trip to Dreamland had been postponed on the previous Saturday, owing to the Ward's visit, but Harry intended taking his sisters on the following afternoon, and he was in the midst of a vivid description of some of the attractions of that fascinating place, when the postman's whistle was heard, and Peggy, as usual, went out for the mail.



"There's only one letter," she announced, "and it's for you, Edith. It's got the California postmark, and I think it's from Aunt Mary. It looks just like the ones grandma used to get from her."

Edith said nothing, but held out her hand for the letter, and Peggy's heart suddenly began to beat uncomfortably fast. She watched her sister with anxious eyes, while she opened the envelope and read its contents, and when Edith had finished, she inquired timidly——

"Is it from Aunt Mary?"

"Yes," said Edith, and then she added, rather hastily——

"Peggy dear, don't you want to run up to my room, and bring me down that note I left on my bureau? I am going to get Harry to post it in the city."

Peggy rose reluctantly, and left the room, with less alacrity than she usually showed when doing her sister's errands.

"I have had a letter from Aunt Mary," Edith said, as soon as she and her brother were alone together. "She has heard from her friends, and they are quite willing to take Peggy back to California. They expect to leave New York on the second of July."



"Confound it!" muttered Harry, and he looked decidedly vexed.

"I am sorry it is to be so soon," said Edith, with a sigh. "I hoped they might decide to wait a week or two longer. Aunt Mary has sent me their address, and wants me to let them know if Peggy can be ready by that day."

"Look here," said Harry, laying down his knife and fork, and speaking with unusual earnestness; "do you really think it's necessary to send the kid off so soon? Why not keep her a while longer, and trust to finding some other people going that way, who will take charge of her?"

Edith looked doubtful.

"I hate to have her go so soon myself," she said, "but this seems such a good opportunity. Nobody knows when such another may occur. I would gladly keep Peggy all summer, but there is my trip to Bar Harbor in August."

"Bother!" ejaculated Harry, impatiently. "Why can't I look after the kid while you're away? She would be company for me in the evenings."

"My dear boy; how absurd. Why, you are in the city all day long. What would the poor child do by herself from morning till night? No,



dear, I really think it will be best to let her go, sorry as I shall be to part with her."

"You haven't mentioned the subject to her yet, I suppose?"

Edith shook her head.

"No, I haven't," she said, "and that's the worst part of the whole thing. You don't know how I dread telling her. She is such an affectionate little thing; I believe she has really grown very fond of us."

"If I were you I would get it over as soon as possible," said Harry, grimly. "That is, of course, if you have really made up your mind she has got to go."

At that moment Peggy returned.

"Thank you, dear," said Edith, taking the note her little sister held out to her, rather absently. "Don't you feel well this morning, Peggy?" she asked. "Your face is flushed, and your eyes look heavy."

"My throat is a little bit sore, and my head ached when I woke up, but I think it's better now. What did Aunt Mary say in her letter?"

"Well," said Edith, slowly, "she said a good many things. They all miss you, and are anxious to have you back with them."

Peggy smiled faintly, but said nothing, and



after a moment's pause, Edith went on, not without some embarrassment——

“You know, Peggy dear, that when grandma died, she expected that your home was to be with the Eliots’, and she asked Aunt Mary to take care of you.”

Again Edith paused, waiting for Peggy to speak, but still the little girl said nothing. Her eyes were fixed steadily on the pattern of the table-cloth, but Harry—who was watching her closely—saw that her lip was trembling.

“When you were ill, and the doctor recommended change of air and scene for you,” Edith went on, “Aunt Mary thought it would be a good plan to send you to us for a while; but it was only to be a visit; she never intended giving you up altogether.”

“I know she didn’t,” said Peggy, in a very low voice. “She said it was only to be for a visit.”

Edith looked relieved. Peggy was taking the news much better than she had expected.

“Well, dear,” she said, cheerfully, “you know Harry and I would like to be able to keep you with us for a long time, but of course we couldn’t let you take the journey to California by yourself, and so we have to send you back when we



know of some one who is going that way, and who will take charge of you. Now Aunt Mary has written to say that she has some friends who are going to California next month, and we think—that is, Aunt Mary thinks——”

“I know,” said Peggy, quietly, as her sister paused, uncertain how to go on. “I’m to go the first of July; there are just sixteen more days.”

Edith gave a violent start.

“How did you find out—who told you?” she gasped.

“I heard you telling Miss Foster’s brother one night on the piazza. It was very hot, and I couldn’t go to sleep, so I got up and sat by the window. I didn’t mean to listen, but I couldn’t help hearing.”

“And why did you never mention it to us?”

“Because—because—oh, I couldn’t talk about it. I thought you had to do it, and—and I didn’t want to be a bother.”

Harry arose abruptly; pushed back his chair from the table, and walked out of the room, without a word. Edith sat quite still for a moment, regarding her little sister in silence. Her own lips were trembling, and there were tears in her eyes.

“You are never a bother, Peggy,” she said,



unsteadily. "I believe you are the best little girl in the world."

Peggy's face brightened, and she nestled close to her sister.

"I'm so glad," she said. "I was afraid I might be a bother, and that was why you couldn't keep me always, but if it's only because you think grandma wanted me to live with Aunt Mary, I—I don't mind so much. Oh, Edith dear, please don't cry." For to Peggy's horror, her sister had suddenly burst into tears.

At sight of her little sister's distress, however, Edith recovered her self-possession, and after giving Peggy a hurried kiss, she too rose and left the room.

"Peggy, dear," said Edith, coming out on the piazza a couple of hours later; "Agnes Robinson has telephoned over to ask if I will go automobiling with her this morning. She is taking a party of girls over to Pompton to lunch. Do you think you can get on all right without me at luncheon? I shall be back early in the afternoon."

Peggy, who was lying in the hammock, doing nothing, looked up with a faint attempt at a smile.

"I won't mind a bit," she said, trying hard to



speaking cheerfully, and glancing apprehensively at her sister, whose eyes were still red, although she was smiling as usual.

"Very well; I'll tell Agnes to stop for me, then. It's such a lovely day, and I am so fond of automobiling, that I hate to give it up. How is your head?"

"It doesn't ache much," said Peggy, passing her hand across her forehead. "It's so nice and cool out here, it makes it feel better. I guess I'll stay here till luncheon time. Has Mrs. Rutherford come home yet?"

"Not yet, but I believe she and Maurice are both coming home either to-day or to-morrow. I had a note from Maurice yesterday. His brother is much better."

"I'm glad," said Peggy. "I love Mrs. Rutherford very much. Oh, Edith, I want to tell you about something that happened the day you went to the wedding. I went to see Mrs. Rutherford, but she had gone away, and just as I was coming out of her gate I met——"

"Excuse me dear; I really can't wait to hear about it just now, Edith interrupted, a little impatiently. "I must hurry and dress, for Agnes wants to start in half an hour."

"I'm glad she's going," Peggy said to her-



self, repressing a sigh, as Edith disappeared through the open door into the house. "I thought perhaps she would stay home on her birthday, but my head does ache pretty badly, and I don't feel a bit like doing anything but just keeping still. Perhaps if she stayed at home she might cry again, and that would be dreadful. I'll go and find out how Minna Winkler is this afternoon, if I feel better."

But Peggy did not feel better. On the contrary, the pain in her head grew steadily worse. Her throat was very sore, too, and uncomfortable little chills began to run up and down her back. She watched her sister start off with a merry party of friends, in the Robinsons' big touring car, and after that she lay in the hammock and dozed, until Joanna came to call her to luncheon.

"I don't think I feel very hungry to-day," she said, as she followed the maid slowly into the dining-room. "Would it make any difference if I didn't eat any luncheon?"

"What's the matter—don't you feel well?" Joanna inquired, in surprise.

"Not very. I've got a headache, and my throat is sore, but I guess I'll be all right pretty soon. Could I have a glass of lemonade and



some cake? I don't think I want anything else."

"I will make you some lemonade," said Joanna, good-naturedly, "but I wouldn't eat cake if I had a headache."

"All right," said Peggy; "I'll just drink the lemonade, then."

So Joanna, who was not a very clever person, and had never had any experience with children, brought Peggy a glass of iced lemonade, and then took away the untasted luncheon, remarking that fasting was the best cure for a sick headache. Peggy drank the lemonade thirstily, and it made her throat feel better for a few minutes, but her head felt very heavy, and when Joanna had left the room, she went back to the hammock, where she soon fell asleep.

She must have slept some time, and when she woke it was with a start, caused by the sound of a voice close beside her, and on opening her eyes, she found Miss Harriet Foster looking down at her with a smile.

"Why, you lazy little girl to go to sleep in the middle of the afternoon," said the young lady, laughing, as Peggy sat up and rubbed her eyes. "Is Edith at home?"

"No," said Peggy; "she's gone automobiling



with Miss Robinson and some other young ladies. They went over to Pompton to lunch."

"Tell her I came to wish her many happy returns of the day. I can't stop now, for I am on my way to golf. Oh, by the way, have you heard the news about your friends the Winklers?"

"No," said Peggy, blushing. Something in Miss Foster's tone made her fear the young lady was laughing at her, but her next words were grave enough.

"Two of the children are very ill with diphtheria. The eldest girl has it, and one of the little ones, I believe. I only heard it this morning. My mother sent for Mrs. Winkler to do some washing, and our man, who took the message, brought back word that the children were ill with diphtheria. There have been several other cases in that neighborhood. Now, I really must hurry, for I have a friend waiting for me. Be sure you don't forget to tell Edith I called." And Miss Foster hurried away, quite unconscious of the effect produced by her news on Edith's little sister.

For several minutes after Miss Foster had gone, Peggy sat quite still, staring straight before her, with round, horrified eyes. The Wink-



lers had diphtheria, that dreadful disease, of which Mrs. Rutherford's little Alice had died. Perhaps Tilly and Minna would die too, and she would never see them any more. But people did not all die who had diphtheria; there was the boy who gave it to Alice Rutherford. She remembered the sign over the door of the house in Frog Hollow. That was to warn people to keep away, so that they might not take the disease. Could Minna and Tilly have taken diphtheria from the people in that house? Perhaps it was Cora who was ill, and not Minna at all; Miss Foster had only said one of the little ones, but Minna was certainly very ill that day last week. Could it be possible that, even then, she had diphtheria, and nobody knew it? She had complained a great deal of her throat, and Mrs. Rutherford said Alice had a dreadful throat. Then, suddenly a terrible conviction burst upon the poor child, and she clasped her hands, with a sob of terror.

"That's what's the matter with me," she gasped; "my throat is very sore, and I feel ill and queer all over. I've got diphtheria; I caught it from Minna, and perhaps I shall give it to Edith and Harry and Joanna. Oh, what shall I do about it?"



It was a terrible thought, and for the first few moments the poor little girl was too frightened to do anything but cry helplessly.

"I can't give it to them; oh, I can't!" she sobbed. "Perhaps they'll die, and it'll be all my fault. They've been so good, and never called me a bother, though I know I must have been one, or they wouldn't want to send me back to California. Oh, I don't mind having diphtheria so much myself, but I can't let Edith have it!"

Suddenly she lifted her head, and sat up straight, her eyes shining feverishly.

"I know what I'll do," she cried, springing out of the hammock; "I'll go to the hospital. When people are ill they often go there. Then I can't give it to anybody, because I don't suppose doctors and nurses are ever ill."

She flew into the house, and upstairs to her room, shaking from head to foot with nervous excitement. Joanna and the cook were both in the kitchen, and there was no one to see her as she snatched her hat from the closet, and her purse from the bureau drawer.

"I must go quick, quick," she kept repeating to herself. "I mustn't let anybody know what I'm going to do, or they won't let me, and if



Edith comes home she may get diphtheria right away."

She was already half-way downstairs again, when a new idea caused her to pause.

"Edith will be so frightened if she doesn't know where I am," she said to herself. "I'll have to write a note, and leave it on her pin cushion, so she'll see it the first thing when she comes home. If I can only get to the hospital before any one finds out, it will be all right, because of course they won't let Edith come there, no matter how much she wants to."

She ran back to her room, and seizing a pencil and a sheet of paper, hurriedly scrawled the following note:

"DARLING EDITH,—

"Please don't be worried about me, for I am all right, only I think I have got diphtheria, and I'm going right off to the hospital, so you and Harry won't get it, too. Miss Foster says the Winklers have it, and I think I caught it from Minna. I went there the day you were away at the wedding, and Minna was ill, and I helped Tilly take care of her. We didn't know it was diphtheria then, but I think it must have been, because her throat was very sore. My throat



is sore now, and I don't feel very well, but it isn't very bad, so please don't be frightened. It would make me very unhappy if I gave you and Harry diphtheria, and that is why I am going to the hospital right away, before you come home. I hope you won't be angry about my going to the Winkler's that day. You didn't say I couldn't go to see them, only that I musn't ask them here. I tried to tell you about it, but you were busy.

"I am very sorry I have to go, especially as there are only sixteen more days till the first of July, but it is better to do that than give people diphtheria.

"I am,

"Your affectionate sister,

"PEGGY."

Having pinned this note on Edith's cushion, and given one last loving glance about the pretty room, Peggy once more started for the stairs, but on the top she paused, and next moment had darted back to her own room, and snatched Dorothea in her arms.

"Good-bye, my precious," she sobbed, hugging her treasure tight, and covering the scarred face with kisses; "I can't give you diphtheria,



because you are only a doll, but I might give it to Edith and Harry if I stayed. I'm dreadfully scared, Dorothea, but oh, I will try not to be a baby."

Three minutes later, a resolute little figure, in a white muslin dress and a black straw hat, was walking rapidly down the path to the front gate.

It was after six when Edith reached home, for the party had decided to return by a different road, and a punctured tire had caused considerable delay. She found that her brother had arrived before her, and was smoking a cigar on the piazza.

"Where's Peggy?" was Edith's first question, as the automobile puffed away down the street.

"I don't know," said Harry; "I haven't seen her, but I only came in ten minutes ago."

"I had no idea we should be gone so long," Edith explained. "I hated to leave the poor little girl alone all the afternoon. I'll go and see where she is."

"Wait a minute," said Harry, who was looking unusually serious.

"Sit down; there's something I want to talk to you about."

Edith sat down obediently, although she was a little surprised by the request.



"It's about Peggy," Harry went on, not without some embarrassment. "I've been thinking of it all day, and—well, the fact is, I can't bear the idea of packing the little thing off to California again. We are her nearest relatives, and it seems to me that it's our duty to look after her, not Aunt Mary's. She's fond of us, and for my part, I don't want to give her up, and that's the long and short of it."

Harry paused, flushing with embarrassment, and glanced anxiously at his sister. Somewhat to his surprise, he saw that Edith was smiling.

"I always said you and I were perfectly suited to each other, Harry," she said, laying her hand affectionately on her brother's shoulder. "It's very funny, but do you know, dear? I've been thinking about Peggy all day too, and I came home fully intending to tell you that I had made up my mind to keep her, provided you had no objection."

"Edith, you're a brick!" exclaimed Harry, his honest face beaming with satisfaction. "I was half afraid to mention the subject, for fear you might not see it in the same way that I did. Of course keeping the kid does involve a good deal of responsibility, but she is our own little sister, and—confound it! I couldn't bear the look



in her eyes when you were telling her about Aunt Mary's letter this morning. I believe I'm getting silly over the baby, after all."

"I know I am," said Edith laughing. "I believe she is the dearest child in the world, and when it came to actually writing to those people, and arranging for them to take her back to California, why, I simply couldn't do it. Now I'll go and find her, and tell her the good news. It will make her happy, I know, and I shall be happier myself when I can get that look you mention out of my thoughts, for it has been haunting me all day."

Harry smiled, well satisfied, and took up the evening paper, while his sister hurried into the house, calling pleasantly, "Peggy, Peggy dear, where are you?"

But Harry had not read his paper in peace many minutes, when he found Edith once more at his side. One glance at her white, horrified face was sufficient to cause the paper to drop unheeded at his feet.

"Good heavens! Edith, what?——"

"Read that," cried Edith, thrusting a sheet of paper into his hand. "It's all my fault. Maurice warned me to tell Peggy to keep away from the Winklers', and I forgot. She tried to



tell me something about it this morning, I know, but I was in too great a hurry to listen. Oh, Harry, what shall I do—what shall I do? She loves us so, and I—oh, I can never forgive myself!” And poor Edith broke down completely, and burst into a passion of tears.



## CHAPTER XV

### PEGGY'S QUEST

**F**OR several minutes Peggy walked on rapidly, her one desire being to get as far as possible from home before anybody recognized her, but at the corner of the street she paused uncertainly. It had all been so sudden; she had not taken a moment to think; but now it suddenly occurred to her, with a shock, that she had not the least idea where to find a hospital.

“If Dr. Rutherford were only at home,” she said to herself, “he would tell me where to go. He wouldn’t let me give Edith diphtheria, I know, but I’m afraid to go to that Dr. Johnson. He doesn’t know Edith, and he might make me go home again. Perhaps there isn’t any hospital in Montclair at all. Perhaps I shall have to go all the way to New York to find one.”

That was a dreadful thought, for Peggy had never travelled alone in her life, and her recol-



lection of the big, noisy city was very "frightening." Still, anything was better than running the risk of being sent home, and with a sudden determination that was almost heroic, she quickened her steps, and turned toward the railway station.

A group of children were playing on the sidewalk just in front of her, and at sight of them Peggy hastily crossed to the opposite side of the street.

"I might give it to them," she said, with a shudder. "Oh, I don't want to make any one ill." And suddenly, the poor little girl began to cry. But in a moment she had choked back the tears. If people saw her crying, they might ask awkward questions, and the thing she chiefly wished to avoid was being questioned.

In the first excitement of Miss Foster's news, she had almost forgotten her headache, but now, as she trudged rapidly towards the station, she became conscious of the fact that the pain had grown worse, and that her throat was getting very sore indeed. She plodded bravely on, however, and reached her destination without meeting any one she knew.

There were only a few people about the station at that time of the afternoon, and the ticket



agent apparently saw nothing unusual in a prettily dressed little girl, with flushed cheeks and heavy eyes, asking for a ticket to New York. Fortunately, the fare was only thirty cents, for Peggy's purse contained but forty-five, the sole remains of the five dollars Aunt Mary had given her for spending money. All the rest had gone for candy, for ice cream soda, and flowers for Edith. Fifteen cents is not a large sum with which to enter a big, strange city, but Peggy never thought of that. She was only too thankful to find an empty seat in the waiting train, and to rest her aching head against the cushioned back.

In a few minutes the train began to move, but there were not many people in the car, and none of them appeared to take any notice of Peggy. She leaned back in her corner, with closed eyes, and before long fell into a feverish doze. She thought she was back in California, and that Fraulein was standing beside her, telling her it was time to get up, and woke with a start to find the conductor leaning over her, saying pleasantly——

“Wake up, little girl; we're in Hoboken.”

Peggy struggled to her feet, feeling dizzy and confused.



"What's Hoboken?" she inquired, looking about her in a bewildered way.

"The place where you get off the train and take the ferry," the conductor answered, regarding her curiously. "I guess you ain't used to travelling by yourself."

"No, I'm not" said Peggy; "I never travelled alone before."

"Folks going to meet you at the ferry?"

Something in the conductor's manner caused Peggy an uncomfortable fear. Suppose he were to insist on taking her back to Montclair?

"I'm all right, thank you," she said, primly, and without another word she turned and walked out of the car. The conductor looked after her a little anxiously.

"Queer young one," he said to himself; "I hope she ain't lost. Didn't seem to like being asked questions, but she's small to be going about the country with nobody to look after her."

Peggy's hands and feet were cold, and her knees shook so that walking was not easy, but she struggled bravely on, following the line of people to the ferry boat. There she selected a seat as far removed as possible from any one else, and while the boat steamed across the river,



she tried to decide on some plan of action; but her head ached so that it was hard work to think, and her ideas kept getting twisted and confused, so that when they reached the New York side, and all the people rose from their seats, she was no nearer a solution of her difficulty than she had been at first.

Oh, the dreadful crowd! the noise! the confusion, as Peggy stepped off the ferry boat into the busy New York street. It was after five, and already the suburban rush had begun. The poor child was pushed and jostled until she became utterly bewildered.

"I don't know where to go; oh, I don't know where to go!" she moaned, and it was no use any longer to try to keep back those babyish tears. "The hospital may be ever so far away, and I feel so very ill."

Then a terrible longing came over her—the longing to see some one she knew—some one who would take care of her. Not Edith or Harry; that would never do, but some one who would speak kindly to her, and take her to a place where she could lie down and be quiet. She thought of Aunt Mary; Fraulein; Joanna; even the disagreeable Christine. But alas! there



was not one familiar face in all that throng of hurrying people, and in a few moments she began to move slowly along the street.

"I'll have to ask a policeman," she decided. "Policemen always know everything."

But it took a good deal of courage to address one of those tall persons in uniform, and she let two policemen pass without speaking to them. But as she saw a third approaching, she made a mighty effort, and stepping forward, addressed him in a very timid little voice.

"Please, Mr. Policeman, will you tell me where I can find a hospital?"

She spoke so low that the man did not catch the words, but he bent down and asked her what she wanted. Peggy repeated her question.

"Hospital," the policeman said, looking puzzled. "What do you want to go to a hospital for?"

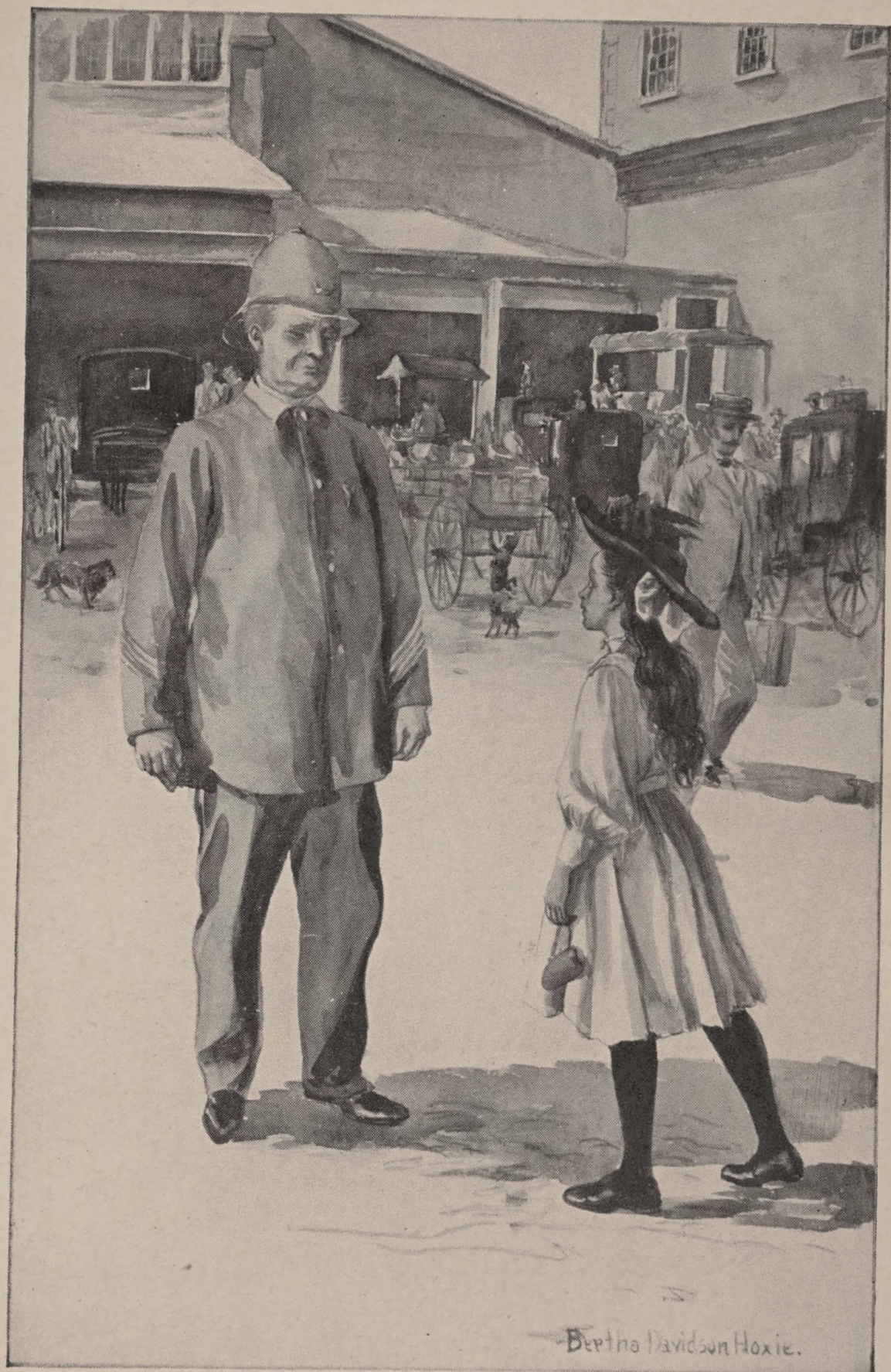
"Because I think I've got diphtheria," said Peggy, simply.

The policeman gave a slight start, and looked at her more intently.

"Who sent you to the hospital?" he inquired, sharply.

"Nobody sent me," said Peggy. "I'm going all by myself, because I don't want to give it to





“Please, Mr. Policeman, will you tell me where I can find  
a hospital?” — Page 240.







my sister and brother. They don't know I'm doing it."

"Where did you come from?" the policeman inquired, with growing interest.

Peggy hesitated.

"I'd rather not tell you, if you don't mind," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want my sister to know till I'm in the hospital. She might make me come home, and then I might give her diphtheria."

"What makes you think you've got diphtheria, eh?"

"Because some people I know have it, and I was with one of them when she was ill. Besides, my throat is sore, and I feel very badly indeed." Here Peggy broke down, and began to cry again.

"Look here," said the policeman, kindly; "don't you cry now, and I'll see to you all right."

Peggy made an effort to check her sobs, but she was really feeling very ill, poor child, and it was all so strange and terrible. At that moment they were joined by a second policeman.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, glancing at Peggy. "Lost?"

"I guess so," returned Peggy's first acquaint-



tance. "Queer little kid. Thinks she's got diphtheria, and wants to go to a hospital. Says her folks don't know about it."

"What are you going to do with her?" the new policeman inquired, moving a little further away as he spoke.

"Take her to the station house, and let the doctor there find out what's the matter with her. Then hunt up her friends if I can."

Peggy heard the words distinctly, for the policeman had evidently not considered it necessary to lower his voice, and her heart gave a great frightened bound. The station house! that was the place where wicked people were taken and locked up. Forgetful of everything else in the world but the terror of that one thought, Peggy turned and fled.

She ran as she had never run before in her life, fear giving strength to her shaking knees. People pushed against her, almost knocked her down, but she scarcely noticed them. Instinctively she had turned in the direction in which the greater number of people were going. She had a wild idea of escaping, of being lost in the crowd, for that dreadful policeman would follow her she felt quite sure. Before she had realized where she was going, she had reached the ferry



house, darted inside, and dropped, panting, breathless, almost fainting, on a bench.

"Look, Maurice; isn't that little Peggy Lee? To be sure it is. Why, Peggy dear, where did you come from? Is Edith with you?"

At the sound of the kind, familiar voice, Peggy sprang to her feet, with a cry of joy and relief.

"It's Mrs. Rutherford, and the doctor too. Oh, I am so very glad to see you. You won't let him take me to the station house, will you?" As she spoke, Peggy pointed, with a shudder, to the policeman, who had promptly followed her into the waiting-room, and now stood regarding proceedings with much interest.

"The station house!" repeated Mrs. Rutherford, in amazement. "Of course not. But Peggy, my dear child, what is the matter—are you lost?"

She sat down on the bench, and would have put her arm around the trembling child, but to her surprise, Peggy shrank away from her.

"You mustn't, oh, you mustn't!" she cried, wildly. "If people come near me I may give it to them, and I don't want anybody to die."

Mrs. Rutherford gasped in helpless bewilderment, but her son now came to the rescue, and seating himself on the bench beside Peggy, re-



gardless of her protestations, he took her hand firmly in his.

"Now, Peggy," he said, quietly, "you must try not to be so excited. Tell us all about everything, and in the first place, where is Edith?"

"She went automobiling with Miss Robinson," said Peggy, who was beginning to feel wonderfully calm and reassured by the doctor's presence.

"Then she didn't come in town with you? Who brought you here?"

"No one," said Peggy; "I came by myself. I had to come to find a hospital, because I didn't know if there were any in Montclair."

"A hospital!" the doctor repeated incredulously. "Why in the world did you want to find a hospital?"

"Because I couldn't stay at home and give Edith diphtheria, the way that boy did, who gave it to your sister Alice. I got it from Minna Winkler, but it wasn't Tilly's fault, because she didn't know what the matter was. I know I've got it, because my throat is so very sore, and I feel so ill. Oh, Dr. Rutherford, you will take me to a hospital, won't you? I can't go home and give it to Edith." Here poor little Peggy's self-control gave way, and she burst into tears.



Dr. Rutherford put his strong arm round her, as he looked anxiously into the flushed little face. When he spoke next, his voice was not quite steady.

"Do you mean, Peggy, that you have come all the way to New York by yourself, when you were not feeling well, simply to prevent your sister's running the risk of taking diphtheria?"

"Yes," said Peggy, letting her aching head rest on her kind friend's shoulder, and smiling faintly at Mrs. Rutherford, who was gazing down at her, with loving, troubled eyes. "I was so afraid I might give it to Edith; she's so sweet and dear, and I'm afraid I've been a bother, though she says I haven't."

"Peggy," said Dr. Rutherford, hoarsely; "you are the dearest, most unselfish little girl I have ever known. Now I want you to let me look at your throat, and if I find there is anything the matter, I promise I will take you to a hospital, where kind people will take care of you until you are well again."

The doctor's face grew very grave when he had examined Peggy's throat, and after saying a few words to his mother in a low voice, he hurried away, leaving Peggy alone with Mrs. Rutherford. Peggy would still have kept as far



away from her friend as possible, but this Mrs. Rutherford would not allow.

"I am not afraid, Peggy darling," she said, tenderly; "I nursed my little Alice, and I had diphtheria myself many years ago." And then she gathered the child in her arms, and sitting there in the crowded waiting room, with the people hurrying by, Peggy poured out her poor little story. She told of her visit to the Winklers'; of what Miss Foster had said, and of the terrible fear that had driven her away from home.

In a little while Dr. Rutherford returned, and taking Peggy in his arms, carried her out to where a cab was waiting.

"Are we going to the hospital?" Peggy asked, as she was placed gently in a corner of the cab, and her two friends got in beside her.

"We are going to one of the best hospitals in the world," said the doctor cheerfully, "and you are going to get well so fast that you will be at home again before you realize you have been away at all."

Peggy's face brightened.

"I'm glad," she said, "because you see, I have to go back to California the first of July, and there are only sixteen more days. I do want to be with Edith just as long as I possibly can. Do



you think I shall be well enough to go home on Monday?"

Dr. Rutherford did not answer, but he suddenly found it necessary to put his head out of the cab window, to give a direction to the driver, and his mother took Peggy's hot little hand in hers, and stroked it gently.

Half an hour later Peggy was lying in a little white bed, in a private room of one of the large New York hospitals. A young lady, in the uniform of a professional nurse, was bathing her face and hands with cool water.

"I think I feel a little better," said Peggy, with a grateful smile. "I hope I'm not going to die."

"Die! what nonsense!" cried the young lady, so cheerfully, that Peggy felt very much relieved. "You are going to be a good, brave little girl, and take your medicine, and let me spray your throat, and you'll be well again in just no time at all. See, here comes Dr. Rutherford to tell you the same thing."

"Did you let Edith know where I am?" inquired Peggy, eagerly, as the doctor came to the bedside, and took her hand.

"Yes, I telephoned at once. Edith and Harry are both very much distressed about you."



"Are they?" said Peggy, and she could not help feeling pleasantly impressed by this intelligence. "You won't let Edith come here, will you?" she added, anxiously.

"No, my darling; Edith shall not be exposed to the danger from which you have saved her; that I promise you," the doctor answered, in a tone of such deep earnestness that Peggy was quite satisfied.



## CHAPTER XVI

### PEGGY COMES HOME

IT was more than three weeks later, and Peggy—a very frail, pale-faced little Peggy—was still occupying the little room in the great New York hospital. She was no longer in bed, however, but sitting up in a comfortable easy chair, while the sweet-faced nurse read aloud to her.

“That’s a very nice story,” said Peggy, as Miss Simpson paused to turn a page, “but I think I’m a little bit tired of being read to, if you don’t mind. You see, I’ve got so much to think about to-day. Isn’t it ’most time for Mrs. Ruth-erford?”

Miss Simpson looked at her watch.

“Almost time,” she said smiling. “Are you so very anxious to go away from us, Peggy?”

Peggy blushed.

“You’ve been very kind,” she said, gratefully, “and I haven’t minded having diphtheria nearly



as much as I thought I was going to, but I haven't seen my own precious sister for such a long time."

"Your sister has been to the hospital every day," Miss Simpson said, "but Dr. Rutherford gave strict orders that she was not to be allowed to see you."

"I know," said Peggy; "I told him to. You're quite sure it's safe for me to go home to-day? I couldn't possibly give her diphtheria now, could I?"

"Not possibly," said the nurse, with decision.

Peggy leaned back in her chair, with a happy little sigh.

"It's past the first of July," she said, "and I was to have gone back to California last week, but Dr. Rutherford says I'm not to go yet. I'm so happy about it. Perhaps they will let me stay two whole weeks longer, to make up for all the days I've missed being here. I don't seem to remember much about the first few days after I came. Was I very ill Miss Simpson?"

"You were very ill indeed," said Miss Simpson.

"O dear! I hope Edith wasn't worried. Dr. Rutherford took splendid care of me, didn't he?"

"Indeed he did. He seems quite devoted to



you, and Mrs. Rutherford, too. She was here almost every day, with your sister, and your brother came several times too."

"Did he, really?" said Peggy, looking much pleased. "Harry is such a busy gentleman, that I didn't suppose he would have time. I'm sure he must like me a little, to take so much trouble, but I'm afraid he thinks I'm a dreadful baby."

"No one who saw how brave and patient you were all through your illness could possibly think that," said the nurse, and she bent forward to give the thin little hand an affectionate pat.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and in answer to Miss Simpson's "Come in," Mrs. Rutherford appeared, bright and smiling.

"Well, Peggy," she said, kissing the little girl with motherly tenderness, "are you ready to come back to Montclair to-day? Maurice will be here for us in an hour, and we are both going to take you home."

Peggy smiled happily, but next moment she looked a little troubled.

"Are you sure they really want me?" she asked, anxiously. "I'm not very strong yet, you know, and I'm afraid I may be a good deal of trouble. Edith is so very busy, and I don't think she likes being bothered."



"My darling," said Mrs. Rutherford, smiling, "when you have seen your sister for five minutes, you will be quite sure on that point. Poor Edith has been breaking her heart about you; she can scarcely wait to get you back."

Peggy's eyes shone with delight, but she made no remark, and Mrs. Rutherford changed the subject by saying, kindly——

"I went to see the Winklers yesterday. They are out of quarantine, and all doing finely."

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried Peggy. "I was so afraid they might die. Did they all have diphtheria?"

"No, only Minna and Tilly. A neighbor took Cora and the boy away. Tilly was very ill, but she is getting well fast now. You ought to have seen their delight over the basket of fruit Edith sent them."

It was all very delightful, but Peggy was unusually quiet while she was being dressed for her journey, and even when Dr. Rutherford arrived, she found very little to say.

There were actually tears in Miss Simpson's eyes when she bade her little patient good-bye, and she eagerly accepted Mrs. Rutherford's kind invitation to come and see them at Montclair.

"She is the dearest child I ever nursed," she



told Dr. Rutherford, and though the doctor said nothing in reply, he looked very much as though he agreed with her.

The journey was a tiring one to Peggy, and she fell asleep almost as soon as they were in the train, and did not wake again till Dr. Rutherford roused her to say it was time to get out. But when they had left the train, and were driving through the familiar streets in a comfortable carriage, she was wide awake, and sat leaning eagerly forward straining her eyes for the first glimpse of the dear home faces.

"There's Edith on the piazza, and, oh, there's Harry too!" she cried joyfully, as the carriage turned in at the Lees' gate. "How funny for Harry to be at home so early. Why, I think Edith's crying. There isn't anything the matter, is there?"

"No, no, my dear," said Mrs. Rutherford, reassuringly. "If Edith is crying, it is only for joy. She is so happy at getting you home again."

Peggy stared in amazement at this astounding explanation, but before she could say another word the carriage had stopped. Dr. Rutherford would have lifted her out, but Harry was down the steps, and had his little sister in his arms,



almost before the horses had come to a standstill.

“Well, Peg-Top, this is good,” he said, and that was all, but there was a look in his face that caused Peggy to give a little gasp of joyful astonishment. Was it possible that Harry—merry, teasing Harry—really loved her very much? But next moment she had almost forgotten her brother in the rapture of Edith’s embrace.

“Oh, Peggy, my dear, brave, precious little Peggy!” Edith murmured, holding her little sister close, while the happy tears streamed down her cheeks. “Have you really come back to us at last? Oh, Peggy darling, how I have suffered and blamed myself for it all! But you will forgive me, dear, I know you will, and I’ll try to be a better sister to you in future.”

What need to ask for forgiveness, with those loving little arms clinging round her neck; that radiant face pressed close to hers? In that one moment the two sisters drew closer to each other than in all the weeks they had spent under the same roof.

“Edith,” said Peggy, an hour later, when the Rutherfords had gone, and she was comfortably settled on the parlor sofa, with her sister sitting



beside her, holding her hands, "would you mind telling me something?"

"What is it, my pet?"

"Well," said Peggy, slowly, the wistful, old-fashioned expression coming back into her face; "I think it's better for people to know when things are going to happen, so they won't mind as much as they do when they hear about them suddenly. So I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me just how many days it will be before I have to go back to California."

"Oh, Peggy darling, hush; I can't bear it!" Edith's tone was sharp with remorse, but Peggy did not understand, and her poor little heart sank with a dreadful forboding.

"You mean—you think it's got to be very soon," she faltered, timidly. "Oh, Edith, please don't cry. I'll try not to mind very much. Of course you'll have to send me when you know somebody is going."

"Peggy," sobbed Edith, gathering her little sister in her arms; "listen to me; I've got something to tell you. It isn't anything sad, though I'm such a goose that I can't help crying. That day I went to Pompton with Agnes Robinson—the day you went away, dear—Harry and I both decided that we couldn't send you back to Cali-



fornia. We didn't realize how dearly we loved you until we thought of giving you up. We talked it over on the piazza when I came home, and I went upstairs to tell you. I called, but you didn't answer, and then I found your note on my cushion. After that—oh, Peggy, you don't know how terrible it all was, and how Harry and I reproached ourselves! And now, darling, that you have been given back to us, safe and well, do you think anything in the world could induce us to let you go again?"

Peggy's eyes were filled with a great, incredulous joy.

"You mean—you mean——" she stammered.

"I mean that your home is always to be here in Montclair, with Harry and me. I have written Aunt Mary all about it, and she thinks I am quite right. Why, Peggy, my precious, don't cry so. Aren't you glad?"

"I didn't know before that people cried when they were glad," said Peggy, smiling through her tears; "but Mrs. Rutherford said that was what made you cry, and I can't help crying, though I never was so glad before in my life."

"Harry," said Peggy, solemnly, when her brother came in a few minutes later, to carry her upstairs; Dr. Rutherford having decreed that his



patient should be put to bed before dinner; "I think it's very splendid of you to let me stay here always."

"Bosh!" said Harry, but he bent and kissed the radiant little face, very tenderly.

"Yes, it is," Peggy persisted. "I know I was a baby sometimes, and you don't like babies. Maud said boys never did, and I don't suppose gentlemen do either. I'm afraid I can't always help being scared about some things, but I will try not to be a—a 'fraid-cat."

"Peggy," said Harry, huskily, "you are the bravest little girl I have ever heard of. I would like to find another kid of your size who would have done what you did; gone away by herself when she was ill, to prevent exposing her sister to a dangerous illness. Everyone in Montclair is talking about you; you're the heroine of the hour, Peggy, and—confound it—I'm proud of you."

It was a very happy Peggy who fell asleep that night, and awoke next morning to a day of new and wonderful experiences. In the first place, Edith would not let her get up early, but brought her breakfast herself, and sat by her while she ate it, chatting all the time in her bright, fascinating way. Then Harry came upstairs to



kiss her good-bye, before starting for the city; an unheard of attention on his part. Next came a bunch of beautiful roses from Miss Foster, and a little later a bowl of delicious wine jelly from Miss Robinson's mother.

"What makes everybody so kind?" Peggy asked, wonderingly, as she lay watching Edith arrange Miss Foster's roses.

"Because everybody loves you," was Edith's smiling reply, that sent the bright, embarrassed color up into her little sister's face.

At about eleven o'clock Peggy was allowed to get up, but Edith insisted on dressing her herself, being under the impression that the little girl still needed a great deal of care.

"I must learn to do a great many things before you go to Bar Harbor," Peggy said, "so I can make it nice and comfortable for Harry while you are away. I don't suppose—" wistfully—"that I could possibly keep house?"

"I am sure you could," said Edith laughing, "and probably do it much better than I; but as it happens, you won't have a chance to try, because I am not going to Bar Harbor."

"Not going? Oh, Edith, why?"

"Well, for several reasons, but chiefly because Harry has decided to take a vacation in August,



and we are going to try some place not quite so far away."

"But won't you be dreadfully disappointed?" Peggy asked, anxiously.

"Not the least bit," Edith assured her. "In fact, I like the present plan much better. You will be with us, and—and I have an idea Maurice and his mother are coming too."

"How lovely!" cried Peggy, joyfully. "You can't think how good Dr. Rutherford was when I was ill. I love Mrs. Rutherford very much, too, and she says I'm like her little Alice, but I'm glad I didn't die when I had diphtheria, the way Alice did. I think I love the Rutherfords next best to you and Harry."

Edith said nothing, but she stooped and gave her little sister an impulsive kiss.

"How pink your cheeks are," remarked Peggy, innocently. "It's a very warm day, isn't it?"

Before Edith could reply, the toot of an automobile horn was heard, and Peggy ran to the window, to see who was coming.

"It's Dr. Rutherford," she announced, peeping through the blinds. "Is he coming to see me, Edith?" But Edith had already left the room.

She was gone so long that Peggy—who was



still rather weak—stretched herself comfortably on the sofa, and had almost dropped into a doze before her sister returned, followed by the doctor.

“Well, little girl, and how are you feeling this morning?” Dr. Rutherford asked, drawing a chair to her side, and taking her hand in his.

“I’m very well indeed,” said Peggy, smiling. “I didn’t wake up once all night, and I was so hungry for breakfast. Edith wouldn’t let Joanna bring it up. She did it all herself. Wasn’t she good?”

“Very good indeed,” agreed the doctor, with such a significant glance at Edith, that she became suddenly very busy arranging the things on the bureau. “Where do you think I have been this morning?”

“I don’t know,” said Peggy, looking interested.

“To see the Winklers. I thought I would stop and inquire how they were getting on, and I am happy to say, they are doing finely. Minna is as well, and almost as fat as ever. Poor Tilly has had a hard time of it, and is still pretty weak, but she is a plucky little girl, and she will be quite strong again in a few weeks. She has been greatly distressed about you. She says you



would never have caught diphtheria if she hadn't let you see Minna."

"But she didn't know Minna had it," said Peggy, eager to vindicate her friend. "It wasn't her fault."

"Of course it wasn't; that's just what I've been telling her, but I don't believe she will be quite satisfied until she sees for herself that you are all right. I told her she must come and have a look at you as soon as she is strong enough."

Peggy flushed with pleasure.

"I'd love to see her," she said, "for I admire her very much, but perhaps Edith wouldn't like to have her come again."

"Oh, yes, she would," said the doctor, smiling. "Tilly is a fine girl, and her mother is a very respectable, deserving woman. But I didn't come on purpose to talk about the Winklers this morning. I came to ask you a favor."

"A favor?" repeated Peggy, incredulously; "what kind of a favor?"

"Well, it's a rather important one. In fact, it is so important to me that if you won't grant it I shall be very unhappy."

"But I will, of course I will!" cried Peggy. "Oh, Dr. Rutherford, please tell me what it is."

"Well," said the doctor, slowly, and he



glanced at Edith, who suddenly left the bureau, and came over to his side; "I want to know, Peggy, if you will have me for a brother?"

"A brother?" said Peggy, her eyes opening wide in astonishment. "Why, I'd just love it, but I don't see how you could be. You're not any relation of ours, are you?"

"Not just now, but I hope I may become one before very long." As he spoke, Dr. Rutherford slipped an arm round Edith's waist, and kissed her.

For a moment Peggy sat gazing at the two happy faces, in puzzled bewilderment. Then suddenly, a suspicion of the truth flashed into her mind.

"You mean you're going to marry Edith?" she cried, eagerly. "Oh, is that really it?"

Dr. Rutherford nodded.

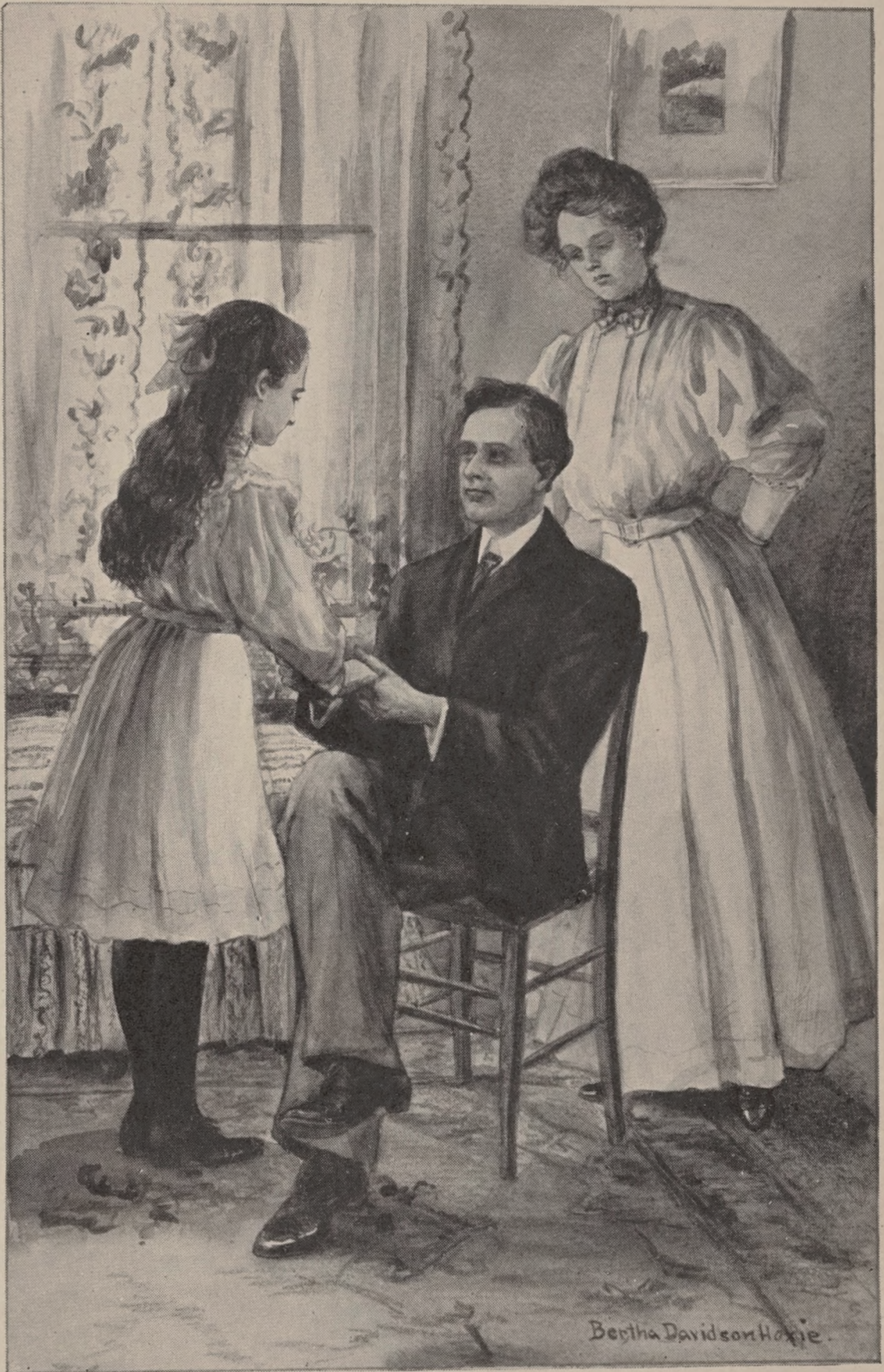
"Will you give your consent?" he asked, smiling.

Peggy's answer was to fling her arms impetuously round his neck, and hug him.

"I'm so glad—so glad!" she cried. "I think it's the very loveliest thing that could possibly happen, and if you are my brother, what relation will your mother be?"

"Well, she will be Edith's mother," said the





“ You mean you’re going to marry Edith ? ” she cried, eagerly. — Page 262.







doctor, returning Peggy's embrace heartily, "and that will make her your—what will it make her, Edith?"

Edith laughed and said she didn't know, but Peggy—who was seldom at a loss for an idea—settled the question by saying——

"Well, she won't be my mother exactly, but she'll be a kind of a half-mother, I guess. I've wanted a mother for such a long time, and I'd rather have Mrs. Rutherford for a half-mother than some ladies for a whole one. Oh, isn't it beautiful to have so many lovely relations? A sister and two brothers, and a half-mother."

"And you have a home, too, Peggy," the doctor said, laying his hand tenderly on the little girl's head; "for Edith and I have fully decided that we can't possibly get on without you, so you are always to live with us."

"Dorothea," said Peggy, that afternoon, as she lay on the sofa, cuddling her forlorn treasure in her arms, while Edith received visits of congratulation downstairs; "I think the world is a very beautiful place indeed. I'm so glad I didn't die of diphtheria, for then I should never have known about all the lovely things that are going to happen. There are three of them. First,



Edith is going to marry Dr. Rutherford, and I'd rather have him for my brother than any gentleman I ever knew. Then, I'm always to live here in Montclair, and go to school, and have friends, and see my precious Edith every day. But I think the third is the best of all, and that is about Harry. Oh, Dorothea dear, he doesn't think I'm a coward any more, and he said such a beautiful thing to me yesterday. I did want to be brave, and have Harry admire me, but I didn't think I could possibly be. I didn't know it was brave to go away, and not let Edith get diphtheria, and I don't think it was, really, because of course I had to do it; but Harry said he was proud of me, and I don't believe, Dorothea, that you have any idea what a very nice feeling it gives to have your brother say that."

THE END



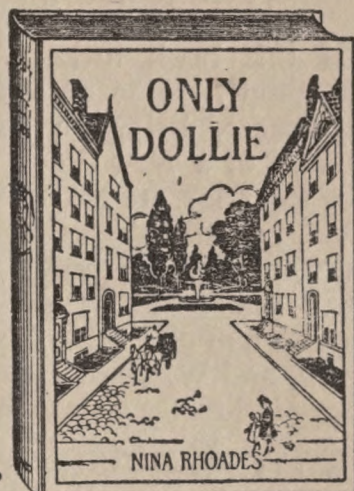
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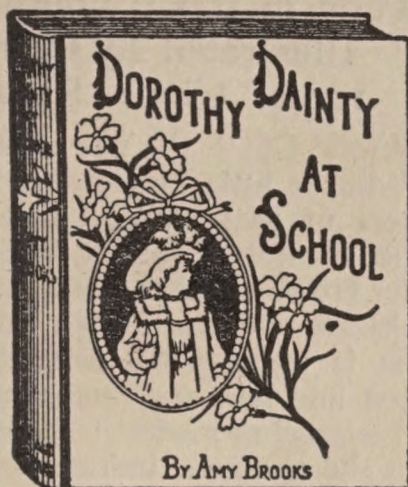
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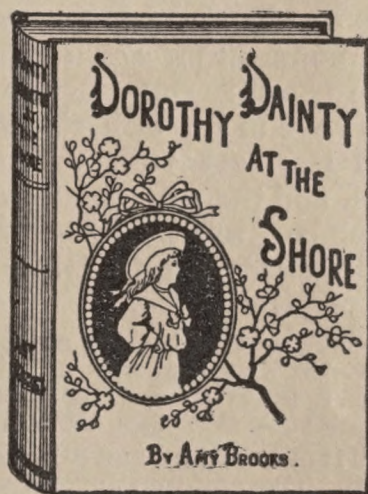
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